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The Leader Cult in Communist Romania 1965-1989:
Constructing Ceaușescu's Uniqueness in Painting

A dissertation submitted by Alice Carmen Rodica Mocanescu in accordance with the requirements of the University of Durham for the degree of Doctor of Philosophy

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University of Durham
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November 2007



13 FEB 2008

Abstract of *The Leader Cult in Communist Romania 1965-1989: Constructing Ceaușescu's Uniqueness in Painting*, a dissertation submitted by Alice Carmen Rodica Mocanescu for the degree of Doctor of Philosophy in History, University of Durham, 2007

This study focuses on Ceaușescu's cult in painting. Its aim is to demonstrate that in spite of obvious similarities with the master cult of Stalin, the Romanian leader's cult was not a simple adaptation of Stalin's cult, but it had its own particularities which became apparent precisely in his painted representations. The cult of Ceaușescu in painting incorporated local artistic traditions and styles (precisely mediaeval art and folk art) and developed its own form from an early period. It also followed the evolution of Ceaușescu's cult, the shifts and the themes elaborated by Romanian propaganda.

Chapter 1 attempts to determine the place of the visual image within Ceaușescu's cult. It investigates different forms of the Ceaușescu cult through which he tried to master time and to impose his image as an extraordinary leader, admirable continuer of the great Romanian rulers. Chapter 2 deals with the shaping of cultural policy at the beginning of Ceaușescu rule. It focuses on the tense relationship between Marxism-Leninism, nationalism and Westernisation and tries to see how the neo-Stalinist cultural policy emerged at the beginning of the seventies and further shaped Ceaușescu's cult. Chapter 3 analyses the mechanisms of cult production within the Romanian Artists' Union. It also tries to identify the relationships that existed between the Union's leadership, the rank-and-file members of the Union and the organisations in charge with commissioning Ceaușescu's paintings. Chapter 4 explores the coalescence of the discourse on national art by contrasting Ceaușescu's speeches and writings with the ideas circulated on this topic by art historians and art critics. The analysis demonstrates intellectuals' penchant for the discourse on national art and their contribution to its refinement. Furthermore, this chapter tries to establish the link between Ceaușescu's cult and the circulation of the discourse on national art. Chapter 5 deals with the painted representations of Ceaușescu. It attempts to establish an iconography of the Romanian leader by investigating its main themes and the relationships between them.

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KEY TO ABBREVIATIONS

ASB	Arhivele Statului (State Archive), Bucharest
CCES	Consiliul Culturii și Educației Socialiste (The Council of Socialist Culture and Education)
CSCA	Comitetul de Stat pentru Cultură și Artă (State Committee for Culture and Art)
GP	Gospodăria de Partid
ONE	Oficiul Național de Expoziții (National Office for Exhibitions), Bucharest
OSA	Open Society Archives, Budapest
PCR	Partidul Comunist Român (Romanian Communist Party)
RFE	Radio Free Europe
UAP	Uniunea Artiștilor Plastici (Romanian Artists' Union)
UGSR	Uniunea Generală a Sindicatelor din România (National Trade Union)
UTC	Uniunea Tineretului Comunist (Communist Youth Union)

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Introduction

The twentieth century witnessed without doubt the greatest concentration of leader cults since Roman times. It gave birth to personality cults that spread from left to the right on the political spectrum, in Europe as well as Asia, in America and Africa, in both small and large countries. The ideologies that lay behind these leader cults were diverse and therefore affected the cults in different ways. In Europe, for instance, the two conflicting totalitarian ideologies of the twentieth century,¹ Nazism and Communism, generated leader cults that were rather different in their forms. Nazism, with its ideology based on ethnic superiority and the messianic role of the leader in achieving/restoring the purity of the German nation, gave birth to a leader cult that equated Nazi doctrine with the Führer himself or even conceived of the Führer as the generator of the doctrine. In Communism, a scientific experiment that aimed to build a better world in which the differences between the classes were destined to disappear, the leader was regarded as being the one who knew best how to apply communist doctrine, which, at least theoretically, constituted the ultimate truth and point of reference.² Furthermore, differences between leader cults can be easily observed even within the same ideological family. In Communism, for instance, the cults of Mao Zedong or Ceaușescu are not simple copies of the master-cult of Stalin.

¹ The literature on totalitarianism is very vast indeed. See Hannah Arendt, *The Origins of Totalitarianism* (New York: Harcourt Brace Jovanovich, 1973) and L. Schapiro, *Totalitarianism* (London: Mamillan, 1978).

² Slavoj Žižek underlines an interesting difference between Hitler and Stalin that sheds light on the way the two leaders were perceived from an ideological point of view. He says: 'A Nazi leader, having delivered a speech, stood and silently accepted the applause, but under Stalinism, when the obligatory applause exploded at the end of the leader's speech, he stood up and joined in.', Slavoj Žižek, 'The Two Totalitarianisms', in *London Review of Books*, Vol. 27, No. 6, 17 March, 2005.



On the other hand, it can be argued that the two totalitarianisms of the twentieth century, besides their specific differences, gave rise to a kind of common totalitarian framework³ within which leader cults were generated whose local variants bore more similarities than differences. This was mainly due to the masses-oriented nature of the cults, to their mobilising and legitimising purposes, to the division that ultimately appeared between the real figure of the leader and the constructed one, between the latter and the masses. The advent of modern technology is considered to be a further contributing factor⁴ (new mass media and propaganda tools, modern means of transport, etc.), allowing leader cults to be fashioned in stereotyped forms that could be easily copied and distributed for purposes of legitimisation or mass persuasion.⁵ However, whilst this approach has the advantage of providing a general framework within which to interpret the leader cults of the twentieth century, it also ignores the locally specific conditions and traditions that contributed to the forging of a given cult in the first place. In a very broad sense, therefore, the purpose of this study is to show that 'local characteristics' mattered, that they shaped leader cults in different ways. More precisely, this dissertation aims to prove the above assumption by investigating the cult in the painting of the former communist leader of Romania, Nicolae Ceaușescu. In other words, it attempts to demonstrate that, despite the obvious similarities, the Ceaușescu cult in painting was not a simple adoption of the Soviet model but the result of an intermingling of local visual traditions: communist doctrine in its Romanian guise and nationalism, on the one hand, and the Stalinist model on the other.

In his comparative study of the art produced in the Soviet Union, the Third Reich, Fascist Italy and the People's Republic of China, Igor Golomstock stresses the

³ For a brief review of the main conservative positions which sought to 'historicise and relativise National Socialism' by comparing it with other twentieth century totalitarianisms and genocides, see Mary Nolan, 'Work, gender and everyday life: reflections on continuity, normality and agency in twentieth-century Germany', in Ian Kershaw and Moshe Lewin (eds.), *Stalinism and Nazism: Dictatorship in Comparison* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1997), 317-318.

⁴ E. A. Rees, 'Leader Cults: Varieties, Preconditions and Functions', in Balázs Apor et al. (eds.), *The Leader Cult in Communist Dictatorships, Stalin and the Eastern Bloc* (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2004).

⁵ Peter Kenez, *The Birth of Propaganda State, Soviet Methods of Mass Mobilization, 1917-1929* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1985).

importance of 'geographical horizontals' at the expense of the 'historical verticals' in the exploration of totalitarian regimes and asserts that

the visual aspect of totalitarian cultures is determined not so much by their various national traditions as by the common process of the social and intellectual climate of our time.⁶

Whilst this focus on similarities in the art produced under different totalitarian regimes may prove very useful and lead to the establishment of a framework within which some traits could be explained more easily, it nevertheless obscures the local visual tradition that totalitarian art inevitably absorbed. This local tradition is not always easily identifiable. It is, however, without a doubt more evident at a stylistic level than a thematic one. The big artistic themes may be similar in their content and general purpose (or even identical, as was the case with many works produced under communist regimes) but, more often than not, their final appearance is different. We argue here that it is the leader theme in totalitarian art (particularly in its communist guise) that best reveals local differences and the incorporation of diverse artistic tradition because it came to epitomise each totalitarian regime. Indeed, the leader became the visual and symbolic focus of an entire nation and gained recognition across different social strata. The specific purpose of the visual image of the communist leader was to embody the multiple attributes of the leader whilst remaining appealing to the masses.⁷ This was achieved by creating a type of image that could be easily understood by a large majority of the people and disseminate the desired message. In order to be easily understood, however, the image of the leader needed to be delivered in accessible and comprehensible forms.⁸ As the myth of the

⁶ Igor Golomstock, *Totalitarian Art in the Soviet Union, the Third Reich, Fascist Italy and the People's Republic of China* (London: Collins Harvill, 1990), XI.

⁷ Lars Erik Blomqvist, 'Introduction', in Claes Arvidsson and Lars Erik Blomqvist (eds.) *Symbols of Power, The Esthetics of Political Legitimation in the Soviet Union and Eastern Europe* (Sweden: Almqvist & Wiksell International Stockholm, 1987).

⁸ This fact was understood and stated as such at an earlier stage in the configuration of the leader's image. For instance, Zabaleta argues in his book *Errores celebrados* (*Popular Errors*, 1653) that it is not really important who the author of the royal portrait is, whether he is a famous name or not; what matters is that the portrait be realised in an easily readable manner and that this process take place in a smooth way without much effort on the part of the viewer. See also Fernando Checa Cremades,

'fresh eye' is only a myth and *any* perception of art 'involves a conscious or unconscious deciphering operation',⁹ it was mandatory that the 'code of the previous period'¹⁰ be encompassed in the image in order to make it more easily perceivable by the viewer.¹¹ This is what happened with the image of the leader, which, as the master theme of communist iconography, was expected to appeal to as many people as possible. Although the iconography of the leader was based on an ideologically constructed vocabulary, a sort of ideological 'catechism' encompassing the main themes to be disseminated on this topic, it nevertheless took on different forms in terms of stylistic approach. Furthermore, the visual image of the leader was also subject to changes in the development of the leader cult itself: the specific effects on the cult caused by political events.

The emergence of the Ceaușescu personality cult is a controversial issue in as far as its possible precursors are concerned. Some historians see it as a new and abrupt phenomenon in Romanian history. They claim that the traditional pattern was 'to have rather strong and dominating elites' who would leave little room of manoeuvre to the leader.¹² Unlike in Russia, where the cult of the tsar was a reality of political culture up until the October Revolution,¹³ Romanian political life was dominated by boyars until the middle of the nineteenth century, followed by the Liberal and Peasant parties, whose roles were more important than the first two German kings,

'Monarchic Liturgies and the 'Hidden King': The Function and Meaning of Spanish Royal Portraiture in the Sixteenth and Seventeenth Centuries', in Allan Ellenius (ed.), *Iconography, Propaganda, and Legitimation* (New York: Clarendon Press, 1998), 103.

⁹ Pierre Bourdieu, 'Outline of a Sociological Theory of Art Perception', in *The Field of Cultural Production. Essays on Art and Literature* (Cambridge: Polity Press, 1993), 215.

¹⁰ 'The readability of a contemporary work varies primarily according to the relationship which the creators maintain, in a given society, with the code of the previous period.' Ibid, 225.

¹¹ This echoes what Eric Hobsbawm called 'invented tradition ... which seeks to inculcate certain values and norms of behavior by repetition, which automatically implies continuity with the past.', Eric Hobsbawm, 'Introduction', in Eric Hobsbawm and Terence Ranger (eds.), *The Invention of Tradition* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1992), i.

¹² Vlad Georgescu., 'Politics, History and Nationalism: The Origins of Romania's Socialist Personality Cult', in Joseph Held (ed.), *The Cult of Power, Dictators in the Twentieth Century* (New York: East European Monographs, Boulder, 1983), 129.

¹³ Jan Plamper, 'Introduction: Modern Personality Cults', in Klaus Heller and Jan Plamper (eds.), *Personality Cults in Stalinism – Personenkulte im Stalinismus* (Göttingen: V&R unipress, 2004), 20 and Richard Wortman, *Scenarios of Power: Myth and Ceremony in Russian Monarchy*, Vol. 1 (Princeton, New Jersey: Princeton University Press: 1995), 3-6.

who ruled Romania between 1866 and 1927. The two dictatorships that emerged at the end of the 1930s and lasted until 1944 – namely, the royal dictatorship of Carol II and the military dictatorship of Marshal Antonescu – showed no desire to establish personality cults similar to those existent at that time in Italy, Germany and the Soviet Union. According to Vlad Georgescu, the difference was in the self-limited political character of the Romanian dictatorships, in their lack of attention towards or non-use in any way of the past/history as a ‘model and as justification’.¹⁴ The only movement that attempted to create a personality cult in Romania was the Iron Guard.¹⁵ Its leader – Corneliu Zelea Codreanu, and later Horia Sima – was perceived as a messianic figure, able to transform the very essence of society from the bottom up. The Legionnaires were also the first to change the very basis of Romanian nationalism by focusing on what they perceived as the morally superior Dacian civilization rather than the input of the corrupted Latin conquerors. The role of the leader was thus to restore that primordial purity, to sanitise society in accordance with an ancestral pattern, to acquire a homogenous society whose members would act as one at the leader’s command. Although this important albeit limited personality cult episode shared several significant features with the cult that developed around Ceaușescu, it did not play an active role in the construction of that cult for the simple reason that it was a product of the fascist movement, the ‘traditional’ political counterpart of the communist system. Furthermore, the strong Orthodox stance on which the Legionnaire movement was based impeded any (at least) openly acknowledged connection or its employment by the communist regime.

An additional difference is given by the relationship between the leader and the ideology on which the cult was based. Whilst Codreanu and Sima were praised precisely because they embodied the Legionnaire ideology, Ceaușescu ended up

¹⁴ Vlad Georgescu, *op. cit.*, 130.

¹⁵ Zev Barbu, ‘Rumania’, in S. J. Woolf (ed.), *Fascism in Europe* (London & New York: Methuen, 1968); Eugen Weber, ‘Rumania’, in H. Rogger and E. Weber (eds.), *The European Right: A Historical Profile* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1966); Stephan Fischer-Galați, ‘Fascism in Rumania’, in P. F. Sugar (ed.), *Native Fascism in the Successor States, 1918-1945* (Santa Barbara, California: ABC-Clio, 1971).

being praised for his persona per se. His alleged personal merits, the superseding of communist ideology by a nationalist one, and his place in a lineage of national heroes rather than communist revolutionaries changed the focus in the construction of the Ceaușescu personality cult. In addition, in order to cover this new ‘reality’ and locate him at the apex of this lineage of national heroes, Ceaușescu assumed superhuman dimensions and efforts were made to present him as a titanic personality whose inner qualities allowed him to reach the level of accomplishment he did. In a sense we can talk about a ‘personalisation’ of the cult and, at the same time, its projection into an atemporal, mythical dimension that had little to do with the leader’s real persona. In other words, whilst his personal qualities started to surface and cover a larger spectrum (personalisation), they reached such unrealistic peaks that they led to the construction of a totally hybrid and mythical image of Ceaușescu.

A different tendency in the evaluation of the cult’s antecedents, preponderantly proffered by foreign scholars, viewed Ceaușescu’s cult in connection with the Oriental practices nourished and strengthened by centuries of Ottoman occupation. This approach uses the Weberian demarcation between patrimonial and sultanistic regimes¹⁶ and tends to see the personal, arbitrary style of Ceaușescu’s leadership as grounded in the type of relationships established between Ottoman power and the local elites, in the ceremonial and submissive *habitus* these relationships fostered.¹⁷ Other scholars have identified strong patrimonial tendencies in Romania’s recent history and see the regimes that fostered them as precursors to the Ceaușescu regime. Kenneth Jowitt, for instance, argues that under Gheorghe Gheorghiu-Dej’s regime ‘patrimonialism in its sultanistic form was dominant in the Romanian Party at least from 1957 until 1965’.¹⁸ Whilst this approach sheds light upon the existence

¹⁶ Max Weber, *Economy and Society: An Outline of Interpretative Sociology*, Guenther Roth and Claus Wittich (eds.) (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1978), 231-232.

¹⁷ Juan J. Linz and Alfred Stepan, ‘The Effects of Totalitarianism-cum-Sultanism on Democratic Transition: Romania’, in *Problems of Democratic Transition and Consolidation, Southern Europe, South America, and Post-Communist Europe* (Baltimore and London: The Johns Hopkins University Press, 1996)

¹⁸ Kenneth Jowitt, *Revolutionary Breakthroughs and National Development: The Case of Romania 1944-1965* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1971), 147-149 and 190-197.

of sultanistic tendencies well before Ceaușescu's rule and points to a specific pattern of thinking of the Romanian people, it does not account for the 'exceptionalism' of the Ceaușescu regime.¹⁹

What, after all, did the 'exceptionalism' of Ceaușescu's regime consist of? Can we really speak about significant differences between his regime and those in other communist countries? If the answer is yes, did these disparities have any influence on the construction of the Ceaușescu cult? In the following pages we shall attempt to review the main positions regarding this 'exceptionalism' and identify to what extent it influenced the shaping of Ceaușescu iconography.

The Ceaușescu leadership was often regarded as a 'sui generis... hybrid form of Marxism-Leninism ... a blend of traditional values, elements of Marxist classics, and particular (and peculiar) personal elements'.²⁰ Its main particularity, within Eastern Europe at least, primarily stems from its anachronistic obsession with the rigid Stalinist pattern of industrialisation applied during the 1970s and 1980s, a period in which other countries of the region were slowing the pace of their industrialisation or moving in slightly different directions. Perceived by the Romanian leadership as the pivotal means of both constructing communism in Romania and gaining economic independence and national status, this process of rapid industrialisation was coupled with strong (and only declarative) populist elements.²¹ The accent placed on the role of the masses²² (who in the rhetoric of the Ceaușescu regime became 'the people') – their use as an instrument of control for different social strata and a rhetorical tool in legitimating the leadership's actions – led to a proximity of the leader with the masses that was also visible in the construction of the iconography of Ceaușescu. Ceaușescu's visual image was

¹⁹ Juan J. Linz and Alfred Stepan, *op. cit.*, 344.

²⁰ Trond Gilberg, *Nationalism and Communism in Romania, The Rise and Fall of Ceausescu's Personal Dictatorship* (Boulder, San Francisco & Oxford: Westview Press, 1990), 49.

²¹ Michael Shafir, *Romania, Politics, Economics and Society, Political Stagnation and Stimulated Change* (Boulder, Colorado: Lynne Rienner Publishers, Inc., 1985).

²² There was obviously nothing original in this trend. Stalin had also intended to create a 'mass movement regime'. See Robert C. Tucker, 'On Revolutionary Mass-Movement Regimes', in *The Soviet Political Mind. Studies in Stalinism and Post-Stalin Change* (New York: Praeger, 1963), 7.

frequently conceived in relationship with the masses, who were used as an (unequal) interlocutor or simple background for the leader's image. As was often acknowledged, real popular support for Ceaușescu was always very thin, if not non-existent. Apart from a single moment, when the population approved and enthusiastically supported Ceaușescu's actions,²³ his image as a popular leader was an artificial construct which, by the 1980s, had become totally divorced from reality. Unlike Stalin – who exerted a real fascination on his subjects and whose cult was in one sense the result of a common undertaking by the leader and State propaganda on the one hand, and the people who admired Stalin on the other – Ceaușescu was almost totally cut off from Romanian society, which for the most part acted only as a submissive and emotionally uninvolved amplifier of the leader cult.²⁴ This difference between the Stalin and Ceaușescu cults can be detected in the way their visual images were conceived. Whilst Stalin's representations maintained their coherence and unity, even when the leader's image was totally hyperbolised, Ceaușescu's representations sometimes lost their consistency precisely because of a defective syntax between the leader and the masses. The Romanian leader was often represented as an estranged leader with no real connection to the acclaiming crowds.

Another characteristic of the Ceaușescu regime was its accentuated nationalism. Scholars have devoted a great deal of attention to the study of nationalism because, by the 1980s, it had become a landmark of Romanian communism.²⁵ The issue was approached from various perspectives. Nationalism was seen by some scholars as a doctrine which 'transcended class interests' and was used in Romania precisely because the Romanian Communist Party lacked 'historical links [with the working class] or the camaraderie of revolutionary experience'.²⁶ Furthermore, nationalism was employed by the Ceaușescu leadership as a tool in the process of distancing

²³ The moment was in 1968 when Ceaușescu refused to send troops to Czechoslovakia with other countries of the Warsaw Pact.

²⁴ Mary Ellen Fischer, 'Idol or Leader? The Origins and Future of the Ceausescu Cult', in Daniel N. Nelson (ed.), *Romania in the 1980s*, (Boulder, Colorado: Westview Press, 1981).

²⁵ Katherine Verdery, *National Ideology under Socialism, Identity and Cultural Politics in Ceaușescu's Romania* (Berkeley, Los Angeles, London: University of California Press, 1991).

²⁶ Daniel N. Nelson, *Romanian Politics in the Ceaușescu Era* (New York: Gordon and Breach Science Publishers, 1988), 39.

itself from Moscow and building upon the idea of independence and sovereignty.²⁷ However, the most peculiar feature of Romanian nationalism in its communist guise was the way in which it was used to support the Ceaușescu cult. The manipulation of history played an important role in the construction of the cult around the Romanian leader. History became highly personalised and oriented towards antiquity.²⁸ An 'affective identification'²⁹ with figures from the national past was encouraged through the promotion of highly orchestrated celebrations that were always presided over by Ceaușescu, the unchallenged continuer of past glorious traditions. Furthermore, history focused on historical symbols and myths and on a heroic version rather than a plain, ordinary account.³⁰ All this degenerated into 'hyperbolic claims regarding Romanian historical and cultural achievements'³¹ and the attempt to identify Romanian firsts in all possible fields.³² As far as the field of art history was concerned, the use of nationalism translated into the emphasising of national art at the expense of foreign art, a 'rediscovery' of folk and mediaeval Romanian art and a disdain for modernist and experimentalist endeavours. Moreover, the accentuated nationalism promoted by the Ceaușescu regime encouraged the configuration of a discourse on national art which favoured discussions of national style, national topics, historical painting, etc. All these discussions provided the necessary background for the emergence of Ceaușescu's image within a historical perspective that was at times heavily influenced by local traditional patterns of representing the leader. On a more practical level, the powerful use of nationalism had two important consequences as far as the construction of Ceaușescu's visual image was concerned. Firstly, there was a distinct trend in his portraiture of representing him in the company of historical

²⁷ Mary Ellen Fischer, *Nicolae Ceaușescu, A Study in Political Leadership* (Boulder & London: Lynne Rienner Publishers, 1989), 96-99.

²⁸ Lucian Boia, *History and Myth in Romanian Consciousness* (Budapest: Central European Press, 2001), 220-221.

²⁹ Vlad Georgescu, *The Romanians, A History* (London, New York: I. B. Tauris & Co Ltd Publishers, 1991), 273.

³⁰ Stephen Fischer-Galați, 'Myths in Romanian History', *East European Quarterly*, Vol. XV, No. 3, September 1981; Deletant, Dennis. 'Rewriting the past: trends in contemporary Romanian historiography', *Ethnic and Racial Studies*, Vol. 14, No. 1, January 1991.

³¹ Vlad Georgescu, *op. cit.*, 273.

³² Lucian Boia, *op. cit.*, 80-82. Also on this phenomenon, which began to be scrutinised under the name of protochronism, see Katherine Verdery, *op. cit.*, 167-214.

figures who acted as guarantors and supporters of his actions and policies. A gallery of national heroes was assembled in order to make easier his longed-for insertion into History. It could be argued that this was nothing new in the communist bloc. Stalin was also eager to shape his image in accordance with a mediaeval pattern that would make it more appealing to a population accustomed to a strong paternal figure.³³ But whereas in Stalin's case the employment of historical figures in the construction of his cult was mainly functional,³⁴ in the case of Ceaușescu the historical figures in the end became more than simple ideological props: they became Ceaușescu's alter egos, with whom he was mysteriously able to communicate. As far as we know, Stalin was never represented graphically in the company of historical figures, whilst for Ceaușescu this became an important iconographic motif. Secondly, the interest in folk and mediaeval art led to an obvious appropriation of the styles and visual schemes typical of these forms of art that ultimately resulted in a general tendency to use techniques characteristic of church painting. The painted representations of Ceaușescu therefore have a blatantly 'mediaeval' appearance, their flat, graphic style being one of the most striking characteristics of Ceaușescu iconography.

Besides the above mentioned idiosyncrasies, the Ceaușescu cult developed other features that made it slightly different from the other communist leader cults. Being totally isolated from reality and grounded on a mythical reality rather than on exterior criteria of development, the cult began to develop its own mechanism of augmentation, which led to grotesque forms in the 1980s. The unprecedented personalisation of Ceaușescu's leadership and the aggrandisement of his persona were accompanied by a deep mistrust in his collaborators and a tendency to appoint close relatives to key positions.³⁵ Kenneth Jowitt called this tendency 'party

³³ D. L. Brandenberger and A. M. Dubrovsky, 'The People Need a Tsar': The Emergence of National Bolshevism as Stalinist Ideology, 1931-1941', *Europe-Asia Studies*, Vol. 50, No. 5, 1998.

³⁴ Alec Nove (ed.), *The Stalin Phenomenon* (London: Weidenfeld & Nicolson, 1993), 118-119.

³⁵ R. de Fleurs, 'Socialism in One Family', *Survey*, Vol. 28, No. 4, 1984 and Vladimir Tismăneanu, 'Personal Power and Political Crisis in Romania', *Government and Opposition*, Vol. 24, No. 2, 1989.

familiarization' or 'socialism in one family'³⁶ and its most visible landmark became the dual leadership of Nicolae Ceaușescu and his wife, Elena. Again, whilst this tendency was not unknown in other communist countries, the extensive and systematic manner in which it was applied in Romania makes it an exceptional case.³⁷ One consequence of this was the emergence of dynastic features.³⁸ This, again, was not an isolated phenomenon within the communist system. However, the particularity of Ceaușescu's dynastic communism consisted in its preference for and fostering of an official appearance that drew much on royal attributes of power. His investiture as President in 1974 took place in a ceremony that alluded to a royal ceremony in his bestowing with a sceptre and a sash. Furthermore, Ceaușescu's penchant for the display of royal attributes of power was coupled with the above mentioned inclination towards fostering a gallery of historical figures. All this ended in the emergence of a Romanian dynasty of heroes within which Ceaușescu occupied the most important position. Moreover, the dual leadership and the dynastic features were further incorporated into the Ceaușescu iconography.

Ceaușescu's cult was a unique phenomenon in Romanian history and one without real roots or identifiable predecessors in local political tradition. Moreover, although in many respects it resembled the Soviet model, the cult of Ceaușescu was not a simple matter of adopting the structure, characteristics and mechanisms of reproduction of the master cult of Stalin or the cults of his successors in power. The cult of Ceaușescu was an amalgam of hard-core Stalinism, rudiments of Ottoman practices of power and arbitrary and personal policy-making. Nevertheless, its most distinct feature was its accentuated nationalism, which gradually superseded the Marxist-Leninist rhetoric and became the quasi-official discourse of the leadership. Nationalism oriented the leadership's discourse towards the past and underpinned

³⁶ Kenneth Jowitt, *New World Disorder, The Leninist Extinction* (Berkeley, Los Angeles, London: University of California Press, 1990), 40, 225.

³⁷ Michael Shafir, 'Romania', in Martin McCauley and Stephen Carter (eds.), *Leadership and Succession in the Soviet Union, Eastern Europe and China* (London: University of London, 1986), 125.

³⁸ Vladimir Tismăneanu, 'Byzantine Rites, Stalinist Follies: The Twilight of Dynastic Socialism in Romania', *Orbis*, Vol. 30, No. 1, Spring 1986 and Vlad Georgescu, 'Romania in the 1980s: The Legacy of Dynastic Socialism', *Eastern European Politics and Societies*, Vol. 2, No. 1, Winter 1988.

the articulation of a heroic version of national history in which was stressed the role of individuals who defended and ensured the country's independence. Nationalism also emphasised all things local: the cultural achievements and 'moral' superiority of Romanian civilization by comparison with foreign, mainly Western cultural models and ideas. This led to a rejection of all Western trends and models and the 'rediscovery' of old, local traditions and patterns. The cult of Ceaușescu in painting was directly influenced by this re-orientation towards the past and the re-employment of old visual schemes and styles. The image of the Romanian leader in paintings incorporated elements and postures characteristic of the mediaeval votive portrait. The official portrait of Ceaușescu in particular showed the Romanian leader in a pose that resembled the way the mediaeval *voievozi*³⁹ were depicted. Whilst official propaganda attempted to portray Ceaușescu as the ultimate national hero, allusions to a carefully assembled pantheon of national heroes fashioned Ceaușescu's image according to the desired purpose. Moreover, the style in which representations of Ceaușescu were produced – a flat, graphic style that ignored volume and perspective – was another feature that recalled the way mediaeval *voievozi* were depicted in votive portraits. The employment of this particular style in Ceaușescu portraiture was intended as a way of underlining the continuity between past national leaders and Ceaușescu, of depicting Ceaușescu as the uttermost embodiment of devotion and sacrifice vis-à-vis the nation. The present study endeavours to investigate the various ways in which Ceaușescu's uniqueness-in-continuity was constructed. It attempts to demonstrate that the cult of Ceaușescu was not exclusively an imported product, that it assimilated many local elements and aimed at carving out for Ceaușescu an undisputed place in the national pantheon. The main hypothesis of the present study is that the 'exceptionalism' of the Ceaușescu cult, in particular the extensive use of nationalism, influenced the way in which Ceaușescu's image was constructed. The purpose of this research is to demonstrate how the cult of Ceaușescu in painting, despite following themes and motifs developed in other cults, was a construct that incorporated local elements on a massive scale and followed traditional stylistic patterns.

³⁹ The title of the mediaeval leaders of the Romanian Principalities up to the nineteenth century.

The nature of this study and its methodology

The present study is of a pronounced interdisciplinary nature. It attempts to make sense of Ceaușescu's iconography by investigating both the Romanian leader's visual representations and the politico-ideological and social context in which these images were produced. This study therefore lies at the crossroads of a number of disciplines and approaches (art history, intellectual history, cultural history, sociology of art) and uses both text and image analysis. Both texts and images are read with the same purpose: the isolation of recurrent themes as well as the establishment of relationships and (mutual) influences between ideology and iconography, on the one hand, and between various themes within each of the previous two, on the other hand. This research will make constant use of extensive quotations from texts of the period. Texts by Ceaușescu, art critics, art historians and artists as well as memoirs will be compared and contrasted in order to identify the main tenets of the communist discourse on art during the Ceaușescu regime. These texts, besides their immediate content, represent an important source from which to gain an understanding of the epoch thanks to their awkward rhetoric and stylistic particularities. Furthermore, as the images of the leader during the Ceaușescu Epoch were carefully assembled frameworks of visual signs⁴⁰ and ideological dicta, their reading will aim to identify both the meaning and the ideological purpose that lies behind each image. On a more practical level, this study will use Erwin Panofsky's approach, namely the iconographical type of investigation.⁴¹ Our analysis will achieve a balance between the second and third levels of investigation described by Panofsky,⁴² attempting to identify the salient

⁴⁰ On images as codes of signs and their interpretation, see Norman Bryson, 'Semiology and Visual Interpretation', in Norman Bryson, Michael Ann Holly, Keith Moxey (eds.), *Visual Theory, Painting and Interpretation* (New York: Harper Collins, 1991) and Norman Bryson, *Vision and Painting, The logic of the Gaze* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1983). For the problematique of the semiotic approach in art see Vernon Hyde Minor, 'From Word to Image: Semiotics and Art History', in *Art History's History* (New Jersey: Prentice Hall, Inc. Englewood, 1994).

⁴¹ Erwin Panofsky, *Studies in Iconology, Humanistic Themes in the Art of the Renaissance* (New York, Evanston, San Francisco, London: Icon Editions, Harper & Row, Publishers, 1972).

⁴² The second level, that of 'iconographical analysis in the narrow sense of the word', is concerned with the identification of themes. At this level of investigation a knowledge of literary sources (in

themes of Ceaușescu's iconography and their relationship to the official ideology. Very little attention will be paid in this study to the artists as individuals, to their personal histories, artistic education or specific styles. Discussion of these issues, important and interesting though they are, would have required an enormous amount of background information if it was to be presented in a comprehensible form, making this dissertation unreasonably lengthy and diluting its main focus. The artists, therefore, will only be treated here as belonging to different categories, depending on their relationship with the political power and involvement in producing commissioned works of art. Similarly, particularities within different works will be addressed not in terms of the stylistic differences between artists but as indicators of change and development within Ceaușescu iconography.

In similar vein, the problem of reception of the Ceaușescu cult is not central to this study. That said, a few remarks should still be made regarding this issue. As mentioned above, Ceaușescu gradually became a leader who was totally cut off from reality, isolated in an ivory tower, preoccupied more with the preservation of his constructed image than with making sense of the surrounding reality. The testimonies of his close collaborators seem to imply that, from a certain time onwards, and especially during the second half of the 1980s, State propaganda itself became more preoccupied with maintaining the hyperbolised image in the eyes of the leader himself rather than the people he led.⁴³ Moreover, given the totalitarian regime in which these paintings were produced and the split between public and private spheres and discourses, it is very difficult to assess the reception Ceaușescu's representations received, to know for sure what feelings people had

this case ideology) is essential. The third level, 'iconographical interpretation in a deeper sense', consists of a more complex analysis focusing on the investigation of the psychological framework of the epoch in which the paintings were produced and the artists' Weltanschauung, Ibid, 14.

⁴³ Silviu Curticeanu, Ceaușescu's personal secretary, mentioned the techniques employed by State propaganda in the 1980s to maintain the illusion to Ceaușescu that he was still a beloved and respected leader. For instance, during a visit to Australia in 1988, the *Securitate* (political police) counterfeited a whole range of 'Australian newspapers' presumably containing front-page pictures of Ceaușescu and long laudatory articles on his visit. On each morning of the visit, these 'newspapers' would be carefully arranged on Ceaușescu's desk; he apparently only took a quick glance at them and was satisfied as long as he saw his portrait on the front pages. Silviu Curticeanu, *Mărturii ale unei istorii trăite, Imagini suprapuse* (București: Ed. Albatros, 2000), 232.

when standing in front of portraits of Ceaușescu. As Ceaușescu's relationship to the masses was completely artificial, and only portrayed by State propaganda as one of genuine love and admiration, it is not easy to appraise how people perceived representations of the Romanian leader and what kind of relationship they established to the painted representations of Ceaușescu. Were people really impressed by the painted representations of Ceaușescu, or were the paintings produced more for the personal satisfaction of the leader? This question is almost impossible to answer. What we can say for sure, however, is that those who organised the homage exhibitions devoted to Ceaușescu (the artists, the leadership of the Artists' Union, Party activists) strove to create within the exhibitions an atmosphere that would capture and impress the viewer. This was achieved through various methods.

Firstly, the sheer number of exhibitions encompassing representations of Ceaușescu meant the almost permanent exposure of the viewer (directly or mediated through mass-media) to the cult of the leader. Exhibitions were either openly devoted to Ceaușescu (those held on the occasion of his birthday and Romanian Communist Party Congresses and anniversaries) or were for the celebration of other events whilst also including works depicting the Romanian leader. It is by no means certain, however, that this over-exposure had its desired effect. In fact, it may well have had the opposite effect: giving the people a feeling of saturation and encouraging them to develop ways of faking their enthusiasm.⁴⁴

Secondly, the size of the paintings was another tool employed by artists to render Ceaușescu in a way that implied monumentality and historical importance whilst also winning the viewer's attention. To be more precise, we should explain here that the production of works of large dimensions became a general tendency due to the awkward acquisition criteria applied by the State. The works of art were purchased

⁴⁴ 'It seems to me that the works of art should not be seen in the morning, at noon and in the evening, they should be seen when people feel the need to see them....', Nicolae Enea, Arhivele Statului București, *fond* 2239, UAP, File 13/1970, *Minutes of the Plenary Meeting of the Sculpture Section*, 12 June 1970, 56.

by the State with the purpose of decorating official buildings (offices, halls of institutions, etc.) and because works of large dimensions were needed for these spaces, the State began specifying the size of the work as the first acquisition criterion, irrespective of the quality of the work.⁴⁵ We shall deal more deeply with this issue in Chapter 3. Suffice to say at this point that the competition for commissions based on the criteria set by the State also had consequences for the construction of Ceaușescu's image. Representations of the Romanian leader were expected to be larger than other works, to dominate the available space and impose themselves as the main points of interest at an exhibition. That said, paintings devoted to Ceaușescu never surpassed 'decent' limits.⁴⁶ This was probably due to the general situation in the field of art in the 1980s, the period in which the Ceaușescu cult reached its peak. As a result of a drastic decrease in funds, the number of works purchased by the State gradually began to fall, and consequently the money artists were able to earn also decreased. This situation led to the production of works of smaller dimensions that could be more easily purchased by the State. Because representations of Ceaușescu were always purchased by the State, their dimensions did not matter that much, as long as the works were still generally large and the most 'impressive' pieces at the exhibitions.

Thirdly, there was a particular way of positioning the representations of Ceaușescu within an exhibition that contributed further to their individualisation and directed the viewer's attention towards the paintings. His representations were never displayed in a simple, anodyne way. Different schemes were employed in order to single them out. For instance, depictions of Ceaușescu's were sometimes positioned

⁴⁵ 'The art should be given room in people's homes. This is a fine idea, but unfortunately it is not happening. And this is because, among other reasons, an ordinary home cannot cope with the three, four or five-meter paintings that we see at the exhibitions. Whenever we see these kind of works, one thing is quite clear, irrespective of whether they are good or bad: they target the State's money!', George Oprescu, 'Art for Man!', *Scînteia Tineretului*, January 26, 1967.

⁴⁶ By 'decent' limits we understand dimensions of around 200 cm x 200 cm. In exceptional circumstances the paintings would reach 300 cm X 300 cm. As far as we are aware there are no representations of Ceaușescu comparable in size with those of Stalin, which at times reached gigantic proportions (see, for example, Aleksandr Gerasimov's *Hymn to October* which was 406 cm x 710 cm in size). Extravagance, in the case of Ceaușescu, was seen only in photomontages, which could at times cover entire walls of exhibitions.

on a kind of base and set against dark-coloured canvases that accentuated the surface of the paintings⁴⁷ (Figure 1). Moreover, the base and the darker surface around the paintings made them appear larger, helping them dominate the display. A different scheme involved surrounding the representation with smaller works, which served not to compete with the central piece but, on the contrary, to accentuate its presence⁴⁸ (Figure 2). On no occasion were pieces of the same size positioned alongside a representation. On no occasion were two representations of Ceaușescu placed side by side: each was treated as a unique piece that should occupy the central position on a wall. Sometimes peculiar schemes were used in order to draw the viewer's attention towards representations and induce certain feelings in the viewer. For instance, at one exhibition, two portraits of Ceaușescu and his wife, Elena, were positioned such that it created the impression of an altar, clearly aimed at inspiring feelings of veneration and gratitude⁴⁹ (PLATE 1). The portraits had oval forms, were small in size and placed under a metallic structure in the form of an arch. Both Nicolae and Elena Ceaușescu were depicted as much younger than they were at that time. In front of the portraits, below the arch, were placed vases of flowers, resembling an offering. In a way, this scheme echoed the act of offering of flowers, which was one of the main components in the ritual of a work visit. The viewer was not meant to see these portraits as simple works of art, but to connect with the paintings in same way they would connect with the two leaders in reality. In other words, given that the images of the two leaders could be found almost everywhere, they were supposed to be in a quasi-permanent state of gratitude and veneration.

Sources

Due to the inter-disciplinary nature of this research the primary sources used are very diverse – ranging from written sources to visual materials. The primary written

⁴⁷ Image from the 1986 exhibition entitled 'The Golden Age, Homage to our Beloved Leader Nicolae Ceaușescu'.

⁴⁸ Ibid.

⁴⁹ Image from the 1986 exhibition entitled '65 Years since the Creation of the Romanian Communist Party'.

sources comprise materials published in newspapers and periodicals of the time, the Romanian leader's writings, homage volumes devoted to the Ceaușescu and archival materials. The newspapers and periodicals used include daily publications such as *Scînteia*, the organ of the Central Committee of the Romanian Communist Party, *România Liberă*, the organ of the National Council of the Socialist Unity Front, and *Scînteia Tineretului*, the central organ of the Union of the Communist Youth, as well as weekly or bi-monthly reviews such as *Arta*, the publication of the Romanian Artists' Union in the Socialist Republic of Romania, *Luceafărul*, the publication of the Union of the Writers of the Socialist Republic of Romania, *Flacăra*, edited by the Socialist Unity Front, *Contemporanul*, edited by the Council of Socialist Culture and Education, and *Era Socialistă*, the theoretical and political review of the Central Committee of the Romanian Communist Party. Whereas newspapers such as *Scînteia* and *România Liberă* helped us to trace the development of the Ceaușescu cult and to identify the main themes of the cult on which the official propaganda insisted, cultural reviews such as *Arta*, *Luceafărul* and *Contemporanul* provided the necessary material for the reconstruction of the cultural and ideological environment of the epoch. Of particular use here was the review *Contemporanul*, whose articles were jointly signed by ideologues and genuine men of culture, thus transforming the review, through the interaction of the two 'camps', into an interesting source for the observation of the development of different ideological themes. The review *Arta* was important in this research for a different reason. Being primarily image-based, this review proved essential in understanding how images devoted to Ceaușescu initially began to appear and how their emergence was prepared for, as of 1965, through the focus placed on folk art, national art or art with a historical content.

Because the ideological framework in communist Romania was established at the very beginning, Ceaușescu's writings serve as an important indicator of the changes and emphases in State politics and cultural policy. Although his political conceptions were based on a rudiment of Marxism-Leninism and a powerful nationalist stance and usually delivered in nuance-free statements, they nevertheless

provide a useful tool with which to single out the main ideological themes on which the official ideology was based. Of particular use in understanding Ceaușescu's ideological conception are his speeches and statements from the first period, from 1965 to 1971, before everything became ossified dogma. The issue of the 1971 July Theses introduced a shift of emphasis, away from the predominantly nationalist statements outlined at the IXth Congress of the Romanian Communist Party in 1965 towards a mass mobilizing Marxist-Leninist propaganda. From that moment on, the two doctrines began to co-exist, resulting in a hybrid Marxism-Leninism with strong nationalist overtones. Moreover, Ceaușescu's statements on art and cultural topics were more often than not vague and clichéd, focusing on a few recurrent themes that had less to do with artistic evaluations than with ideological and propagandistic enouncements. Due to the simplistic artistic criteria he used in the evaluation of works of art and his conservative artistic tastes, Ceaușescu's interest in the creation of art in general was minimal, and he rarely went beyond applying a socialist realist and nationalist pattern in his evaluations. However, even this very primitive and biased conception of art is worthy of investigation, as, in the end, it accounts for the development of Ceaușescu iconography in the form we see it today. In the absence of archival documents – which would prove unequivocally the existence of any intervention from above in the construction of the leader's visual image – due to the continued unavailability of files, such as Central Committee documents or documents from Ceaușescu's personal archive, Ceaușescu's writings remain one of the most useful sources from which to identify the set of ideological statements the leadership presented to the artists.

Other important primary sources in the investigation of the Ceaușescu cult in painting are the homage volumes that were published frequently from the mid-1970s on. The bulk of these volumes came out in the month of January, on the occasion of Ceaușescu's birthday celebrations. However, volumes devoted to the celebration of important national feasts (August 23 1944, January 24 1859, etc.) gradually began to include sections dedicated to the Romanian Communist Party and, implicitly, Ceaușescu. These essentially stressed the continuity between the

moment celebrated and the Ceaușescu Epoch, the complete fulfilment under Ceaușescu's rule of the ideals for which Romanians had been fighting for centuries. These celebrations, and the volumes occasioned by them, helped make Ceaușescu's public image richer, through the addition of new attributes and the creation of new facets. All of these volumes were complex enterprises for at least two reasons: they not only used different media to spread the cult (verse, prose, telegrams of congratulation, photographs, paintings, etc.) but also provided samples and, implicitly, instructions on how, for example, Ceaușescu's biography should be written, how his image as a national hero or a warm, accessible leader should be dealt with. We therefore viewed these volumes as if there were canonical books to be used in the construction of the leader's image and used them as a tool of control in the investigation of Ceaușescu iconography.

The two main written archival sources used were *Arhivele Statului București* (ASB)/The State Archives, Bucharest, and the Open Society Archives in Budapest. The collection of State Archives in Bucharest contains various documents from the *Uniunea Artiștilor Plastici* (UAP)/The Romanian Artists' Union in the Socialist Republic of Romania, ranging from the Union's Statutes to norms of collaboration between the Union and its beneficiaries, namely the different organisations and institutions that commissioned works of art from the Union: The Ministry of Culture, through *Comitetul de Stat pentru Cultură și Artă* (CSCA)/The State Committee for Culture and Art, *Uniunea Generală a Sindicatelor din România* (UGSR)/National Trade Union, *Uniunea Tineretului Comunist* (UTC)/The Communist Youth Union and *Gospodăria de Partid* (GP).⁵⁰ Another series of documents encompasses programmes for thematic exhibitions as forwarded to the Union from their hierarchically superior organisations, commissions' acts for different thematic exhibitions and sometimes more specific documents regarding the staging of a specific exhibition. Additionally, there are also some reports on the

⁵⁰ *Gospodăria de Partid* was the body that dealt with the official and anniversary activities of the Party. It commissioned works of art for the various headquarters of the Party, special political events and anniversaries, important events abroad. It also ran a chain of shops with limited public access which sold commodities otherwise difficult to acquire on the market.

situation (financial, editorial, thematic, etc) of the Union's review publication, *Arta*, and numerous documents for the ideological improvement of the review's content. The collection also includes some more trivial information, such as the financial situations of artists, the loans policy of the Union, reports on field trips to agricultural co-operatives or industrial sites, or artists' petitions and letters. These shed light on the internal tensions in the Union, the emergence of different groups competing for resources, and the authoritative and isolationist attitude of the Union's leadership. However, the primary documents in the collection of the Romanian Artists' Union are the minutes of the internal meetings of the UAP leadership and meetings that took place within the different sections of the Union (Painting, Sculpture, Monumental Art, Graphic Arts, Textiles, Art Criticism). It was these documents we made most use of as they allowed us to gain a more accurate picture of the situation within the Union. Unfortunately, the collection of documents pertaining to the Union in the State Archives do not go beyond 1974 and we are therefore deprived of information regarding what happened within the Union in the period of hard Ceaușescuism. However, the first decade of Ceaușescu's rule is the most interesting to us as it was in this period that the mechanisms of cult production became crystallised. Studying this allows us to identify the main ways artists were controlled and forced to produce commissioned works of art. In point of fact, these documents reveal the existence of acerbic competition between artists for the limited resources available and the secret manoeuvrings of the leadership designed to preserve their monopoly over resources.

The Open Society Archives (OSA) in Budapest houses articles and commentaries written by the journalists of Radio Free Europe (RFE) that were usually broadcast as part of weekly shows. Additionally, the OSA contains assessments and reports made by the researchers within the Research Unit affiliated to the RFE. These documents are very useful because of their diary-like nature. The researchers kept a regular record of even the smallest changes occurring in Romania in various fields (Party life, leadership, economy, the Ceaușescu cult, human rights, culture). They also provide a comparative angle in that they usually place the issues dealt with in an

international context by contrasting them with events in the other communist countries at the time. However, use of these documents has its limits and dangers. As a general rule, they are highly critical of the regime and its leadership and indiscriminately positive and supportive of its opponents. This is particularly the case with the texts written by the RFE journalists, who more often than not were émigrés who had fled Romania due to persecution. The assessments and reports written by the RFE researchers are usually balanced, and they try to present the communist reality of Romania in a professional way. The OSA also contains letters or simple notes written by people living in Romania that described isolated incidents or more serious episodes of abuse committed within different institutions or by well known people in leadership positions. These letters were usually unsigned (or signed 'A disappointed communist', 'A poor Romanian', etc.) and notes of caution were written in the margins by the RFE researchers in respect of the credibility of the materials smuggled out of Romania. Most are clearly virulent in nature and can be easily categorised as biased or vengeful. They are nevertheless indicative of the conflicts and abuses occurring in Romania at the time as well as the general negative perception of the cultural heads of the day. The OSA also boasts an enormous chronologically classified collection of clippings from Romanian newspapers and journals on topics of the utmost importance. We researched, for example, files on the construction of the Danube-Black Sea Canal, the disarmament campaign initiated by Ceaușescu in the 1980s and the homage books on Ceaușescu that were published abroad.

The visual basis for this study consists of about 200 images viewed in the original or as slides at *Oficiul National de Expoziții* (ONE)/The National Office for Exhibitions in Bucharest. In addition, we collected information on other images by perusing *Arta* and various newspapers and magazines as well as homage volumes devoted to Ceaușescu and art albums on the art produced in the Ceaușescu Epoch. The ONE is an institution subordinated to the Ministry of Culture which, during the Ceaușescu regime, was responsible for staging most of the 'Homage' or thematic exhibitions devoted to Ceaușescu or important historical events. Where 'Homage' exhibitions

were not held at the National Museum of Art they were hosted by the ONE in its own exhibition hall, the Dalles Hall. The ONE, the CSCA and the UAP were the main institutions involved in the staging of 'Homage' or thematic/anniversary exhibitions. It is for this reason, therefore, that most of the works devoted to Ceaușescu are today still stored at the ONE, which as consequence remains the most important visual database for the study of works of art depicting the Romanian leader. That said, researching these paintings is no easy task. The works are not catalogued and gaining access to them is very difficult for at least two reasons: the paintings are scattered around different stores in Bucharest, and none of these are open to researchers due to a lack of permanent staff. In order to access these stores, a researcher must be accompanied by a member of staff from the main building of the ONE. During our research at the ONE, there was a permanent shortage of such staff – most were involved in a new and more exciting project: the establishment of the Modern Art Museum in one of the wings of the House of the Republic.

Structure of the study

One of the most salient obsessions of dictators, from ancient times to the present day, has been the preservation of their name for posterity, to die with the certainty that their rule will be remembered as *The Golden Age*. Ceaușescu was no exception in this. Quite the contrary, his obsession with how he would be remembered in the future and ensuring his place in history eventually turned pathological. This led to a strong preference for and investment in all forms of the cult considered suitable vehicles for the conservation of his image for centuries to come. Chapter 1 focuses on the investigation of these forms of the Ceaușescu cult, on their relationship to time and history. Besides the verbal praise and flamboyant use of metaphor, his doctored biography and the transformation of his native village into site of pilgrimage, his cult also ran to stadium performances and celebrations of historical events designed to laud the leader and immortalise his name. The architectural transformation of the country and association of his name with the construction of the gigantic House of the Republic in the historic centre of Bucharest were yet

further tools employed in the preservation of his name for all time. This chapter also aims to establish a hierarchy of the different forms of the cult preferred by Ceaușescu and to determine the place of visual images within the cult.

Chapter 2 deals with the cultural policy of the Ceaușescu regime. It focuses on the incipient period of his leadership, that of 1965 to 1974. Analysis of this period is very important because it highlights the shift from the cultural liberalisation initiated towards the middle of the 1960s towards a return to a mixture of socialist realism and nationalism that was to become the norm from the middle of the 1970s onwards. This chapter also addresses the relationship/tension between nationalism, Marxism-Leninism and Westernisation that characterised the first period of Ceaușescu's rule and shaped the basic further development of cultural policy in Romania.

Chapter 3 explores the relationship between artists and the political power by looking at the situation within the Romanian Artists' Union at the end of the 1960s and the beginning of the 1970s. It attempts to identify the main mechanisms by means of which artists were forced to produce commissioned works of art in line with the requirements of the leadership. Furthermore, this chapter analyses the usually tense relationships between beneficiaries (various organisations and institutions that commissioned works of art on behalf of the State/Party) and the Union, as well as those between the leadership of the Union and its rank-and-file members. This approach will shed light on the diminishing opportunities available to artists who chose not to become involved in the production of ideologically tainted works of art as well as the normally cynical, or at least submissive, attitude of most Union's leaders. The analysis of the internal situation in the Romanian Artists' Union is based on an investigation of archival sources at the State Archives in Bucharest.

Chapter 4 comprises an in-depth analysis of the shaping of nationalist discourse during the period of Ceaușescu's leadership. This chapter traces the way this type of

discourse was constructed and refined, both by Ceaușescu himself and by various professionals, namely art critics and historians who were only too keen to work on this topic. The hypothesis of this chapter echoes Katherine Verdery's argument that the nationalist discourse articulated by the political leadership was taken up and refined by intellectuals from various fields precisely because this topic had already enjoyed a long and rich inter-war tradition. The analysis conducted in Chapter 4 proves this assumption and highlights the enthusiastic acceptance of the nationalist doctrine by art critics, historians and artists who consequently gave their support to the creation of works of art deeply rooted in the national tradition. Chapter 4 also attempts to evaluate the contribution of this type of discourse to the shaping of Ceaușescu's image (especially in stylistic terms) according to a traditional, national-based imagery.

Finally, Chapter 5 represents an attempt to make sense of Ceaușescu iconography. It undertakes an in-depth analysis of the evolution of the main themes in the visual representations of Ceaușescu by tracing each theme's development and idiosyncrasies and identifying possible relationships between them. Besides this main purpose, Chapter 5 also purports to identify within the images those traits, visual schemes and motifs that were clearly borrowed from mediaeval art. The ultimate purpose of this enterprise is to prove that the nationalist doctrine vigorously promoted by the Romanian leadership and the moulding of Ceaușescu's public image into that of a national hero left their marks on the way the iconography was constructed. This will highlight the distinctiveness (despite the many common features with the iconographies of other communist leaders also referred to in the chapter) of Ceaușescu iconography and its connection with the local visual tradition. This analysis also reveals the connection between the development of certain themes and the changes that occurred in real life. In other words, the forms each theme took were influenced by the shifts and evolution of the Ceaușescu cult itself. This chapter therefore also endeavours to show that real life also shaped the visual image and that the artists were, whether consciously or unconsciously, sufficiently sensitive to absorb these changes.

1. The Ceaușescu Cult. The Place of the Visual Image

There was no ideology of a National-Socialist architecture... in the end, only the gigantic size mattered...The ideology was visible in the definition of the theme, but not in its style.

Albert Speer

In architecture he [Nicolae Ceaușescu] loved the external monumentality and the internal baroque, as adorned as possible.

Silviu Curticeanu

If I don't have the attention of each and every student, how can I maintain my self-respect? With that remark I learned in a flash the secret of all despotism.

E. L. Doctorow

Within the former communist bloc, the cult set up for the ex-leader of Romania, Nicolae Ceaușescu, proved to be one of the most meticulously orchestrated since Stalin's time. The cult of Ceaușescu was both a very complex and an all-encompassing phenomenon. It was so precisely because it took such various forms and touched basically upon almost every aspect of the public life.¹ It comprised the classic forms of mass adulation (mass demonstrations, letter writing, etc) as well as individual contributions, conveyed through various media (literature, painting, sculpture, etc). It resembled in many of its manifestations the cult of his ideological mentor-cum-'rival', Stalin, yet it had in common with Hitler's cult several features. More remote Asian patterns can also be identified in his cult, especially the prominent role that Ceaușescu attributed to the 'masses' within his cult or his total identification with the Party.² Furthermore, it incorporated local characteristics and

¹ His cult also encroached upon the private lives of the Romanians. One of the most twisted manners in which the cult intruded into the private sphere was Ceaușescu's policy regarding reproduction. The abortion outlawing policy surfaced not as a result of Ceaușescu's genuine interest in the matter or from moral concern, but as part of his cult and its strongly embedded nationalist component: a great leader had to rule over a great nation, great taken here in its most prosaic sense. For this interpretation of the reproduction policy during the Ceaușescu Era see Gail Kligman, *The Politics of Duplicity, Controlling Reproduction in Ceaușescu's Romania* (London: University of California Press, 1998).

² See chapter 2, 95.

restored or perverted some old forms of court ceremonial or the employment of certain mediaeval insignia.³ On the other hand, the enormous amount of human and material resources involved in the production and augmentation of Ceaușescu's cult, as well as its impact upon Romanians' lives for over two decades make it a difficult amalgam to grasp. This chapter aims at identifying the main forms that the cult of Ceaușescu took and at advancing a set of explanations for the obvious prominence of (predilection for) some particular ways of praising the leader. In addition, this chapter endeavours to determine the place of visual image within the cult, to establish to what extent Ceaușescu was personally eager to cultivate its cult through this vehicle.

1.1. The Classic Forms of the Ceaușescu Cult

Ceaușescu's image evolved over time from that of a reformist, breaking-with-the-past type of leader at the end of the sixties to that of a national hero in the seventies, ending up in the eighties as the grotesque embodiment of a communist dictator.⁴ During this long span of time, the cult that had developed to support his image altered as well, not only as a result of its 'natural' growth and strengthening, but also because new forms emerged or old ones were transformed and got new meanings. This alteration was due to shifts in propaganda and to the need to emphasise different aspects of his cult, but also to Ceaușescu's personal interest in some particular forms of honouring the leader. This section focuses on the analysis of those forms of the cult of Ceaușescu that can be encountered also in the cults of his predecessors or contemporaries and which did not change – apart from the aforementioned 'natural' growth - or whose meaning altered minimally over time. Nevertheless, the exploration that follows is far from exhaustive, both in terms of the investigated examples and in the forms taken under scrutiny. It deals only with

³ See chapter 5, 210-212.

⁴ For the evolution of Ceaușescu's image and his struggle to achieve total control over the Party see Mary Ellen Fischer, *Nicolae Ceaușescu, A Study in Political Leadership* (Boulder & London: Lynne Rienner Publishers, 1989). See also Anneli Ute Gabanyi, *The Ceaușescu Cult, Propaganda and Power Policy in Communist Romania* (Bucharest: The Romanian Cultural Foundation Publishing House, 2000).

the most prominent and influential features. Most of the forms investigated here were transposed into visual images or at least shared common characteristics with the latter. Moreover, almost all forms explored below have a strong temporal component, in the sense that they aimed at or their employment was directed toward mastering time. The identification of this temporal component will be a secondary task of the section below whose importance will become evident in the following sections of this chapter.

1.1.1. Verbal Praise of Ceaușescu

One of the most common means of praising Ceaușescu was through the agency of words, verses, affected phrases that aimed at conveying his exceptionality as far as his personal qualities and life-long achievements as a communist leader were concerned. Furthermore, one related idea that was supposed to surface from those laudatory verses was the enormous positive impact that his personality and his epoch purportedly had upon the transformation of Romania into an independent and multilaterally developed socialist society. Consequently, his image has been developed in a heroic dimension that aimed at transcending the time and depicting Ceaușescu as the perfect embodiment of the national hero.⁵

Within this ample theme a few sub-topics can be identified that aimed at facilitating the insertion of Ceaușescu's Era in the course of history. One of them was the contrasting theme of the long, febrile yearning for a national hero and his birth as a gift of history itself. This theme appeared as early as 1968 in the context of the larger one of the endangered motherland and it remained a favourite until the end of the regime.⁶ From simple appellations such as 'The Hero', 'The Saviour',

⁵ For the connection between the hero's image and the mastering of time see the interesting remarks of Serge Moscovici in 'Psychologie des grands homes', Entretien de Bernard Paillard avec Serge Moscovici, *Communications*, 42, 1985, 173.

⁶ For the evolution of the theme of the 'endangered motherland' see Eugen Negrici, *Literature and Propaganda in Communist Romania* (Bucharest: The Romanian Cultural Foundation Publishing House, 1999), 69-71.

Ceaușescu became the providential *conducător*⁷ whose birth was awaited and perceived as a miracle. Corneliu Vadim Tudor, one of the main court poets of the Ceaușescu Era, expressed this idea in terms that seemed to describe the coming into the world of a chosen person:

We present age-old history with hymns and amber
For having borne you safe in her womb up to our time,
Your seeing the light of day is the lay miracle
Which Romanians, hungry and naked, have been awaiting for ages.⁸

It seems that Ceaușescu was given the right to lead the Romanian people by History itself.⁹ This is in fact a very accurate translation into verses of the ideologically constructed image of Ceaușescu as the ultimate embodiment of a long lineage of illustrious predecessors. Unlike Stalin who, at the beginning, shaped his image in strong connection with that of Lenin's,¹⁰ Ceaușescu severed all the links with the regime of his immediate precursor, Gheorghe Gheorghiu-Dej, and sought the establishment of an unchallenging, almost mythical entourage, encompassing Dacian kings and mediaeval *voievozi*. This theme became a landmark in the construction of Ceaușescu's cult and was also generously illustrated in painting. For instance, a 1977 composition entitled *Omagiu* (Homage), made by the well established painter Constantin Piliuță, became the representative opus for this

⁷ The same title – the equivalent of *duce* in Italy, *Führer* in Germany, or *Archigos* in Greece – was employed to designate the General Ion Antonescu, the prime minister of Romania during WW2 and collaborator of the Nazi regime. Therefore the appellation had already a rather strong and distinct connotation: the person who led his people during difficult times and managed to rescue it. Barbara Jelavich, *History of the Balkans, Twentieth Century*, Vol. 2 (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1983), 227.

⁸ Published in *Săptămîna*, November 1979, cited in Anneli Ute Gabanyi, *op. cit.*, 37.

⁹ Maybe it is worth comparing the ways in which the 'messianic' image of power was constructed in the cases of Ceaușescu and Hitler. In the case of Hitler, such words as Fate and Providence were employed in order to stress the remarkable, delivering role he was called to play in the history of his country. The 1929 words of Goebbels are just a sample of the outpouring that was to follow: 'We believe that Fate has chosen him to show the way to the German people.', in Ian Kershaw, *The 'Hitler Myth', Image and Reality in the Third Reich* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1987), 13. On the contrary, Ceaușescu's panegyrics ceaselessly insisted on his direct descending from History.

¹⁰ Robert Tucker, *Stalin in Power, The Revolution from Above, 1928-1941* (New York: W. W. Norton & Company, 1990), 266.

direction¹¹ (PLATE 2). It depicted Ceaușescu in the company of Romanian *voievozi* who had in the painting an obviously certifying function and whose representation fully respected the canonical image of each one of them. It is not the place here to enter into particulars regarding the syntax of this painting; a detailed analysis will be undertaken in the final chapter, devoted to the investigation of Ceaușescu's images. Suffice to say at this point of discussion that the manner of representing the *voievozi*, their postures and outfits, their alignment and positioning within the painting contributed to the singling out of Ceaușescu as the continuer of a long line of historical figures who seemed to have entrusted him with the faith of the Romanian nation. Moreover, the posture of Ceaușescu himself and the style in which the entire composition is realised reinforce further the link between the Romanian leader and his illustrious precursors.

A different device employed in order to establish a link with the past was that of circulating certain images typical for the description of the mediaeval leaders. Whilst the term *voievod*¹² was not utilised to designate Ceaușescu, the metaphors used to describe him were sometimes taken from the Byzantine panegyrics. For instance, the image of the helmsman¹³ who steers his ship through often tempestuous waters was only one of the themes that alluded to a motif common in the Byzantine court literature as well as in those which matured under its influence. Therefore, such a reference was relatively still familiar in the Romanian culture even for those who could not trace its origin and its distinct mediaeval roots. It drew on mediaeval patterns and this was in tune with the desired intention of inserting Ceaușescu's image in a historical framework. The connection with the future was realised by the orientation of the ship of Romania towards the year 2000 which was an obsessive hallmark within the regime's rhetoric:

¹¹ Constantin Piliuță, *Înfiul președinte* (The First President), 1977.

¹² This is an interesting difference between Stalin's and Ceaușescu's cults. While Stalin was called *vozhd'* and recognised as one, Ceaușescu was never named *voievod*, although his image was constructed in close relationship to those of the mediaeval leaders.

¹³ The metaphor was employed in the case of Stalin as well. Sarah Davies, *Popular Opinion in Stalin's Russia. Terror, Propaganda and Dissent, 1934- 1941* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1997), 150.

Towards 2000 new way of glories cuts
Freely the ship of our rounded country,
Defies the waves of the difficult times
The helmsman Ceaușescu Nicolae.¹⁴

The oscillation between past and future, between the theme of the 'awaited leader' and that of the 'visionary leader' who shows the way towards glorious peaks gained in time an unmistakably religious resonance.¹⁵ Constructions such as the 'creator of thinking', 'the one who gives power', 'the one who gives sense to our thoughts and intentions', 'the one who has shown us the way' prolonged the same religious sequence, while they made the passage to another important theme, that of the bond between the leader and his people. The implied super-human qualities of Ceaușescu shaped the relationship between him and his people too. He was 'our lay god, the heart of the party and the nation'.¹⁶ People followed him 'towards triumphal goals/Under the sky of the bright August/Because He embodied most beautifully/The symbol of national unity'.¹⁷

These ideas were illustrated in painting as well. Visual schemes typical for the construction of icons were re-employed in order to underline the uniqueness of the leader, his special qualities and his relationship to his people. The verbally articulated themes that alluded to the hyper-human qualities of Ceaușescu had a visual counter-part that underlined the central role played by the Romanian leader in the transformation of the country into a communist society. One of the late works of the young but already well established court painter Vasile Pop Negreșteanu depicts precisely this image of Ceaușescu¹⁸ (PLATE 3). According to its title the painting represents a work visit. Nevertheless little indicates that a real dialogue is under

¹⁴ N. Petre Vrânceanu, 'O țară și un bărbat se nasc prin vreme', in *Un ctitor de istorie, o epocă de aur, omagiu conducătorului iubit* (Craiova: Scrisul românesc, 1988), 85.

¹⁵ The examples can be easily multiplied: 'The Nation's Chosen One is that called through ages/The present puts on his head its golden wreath.', Mihaela Dumitrescu, 'Alesul Națiunii', in *Un ctitor de istorie ...* 69.

¹⁶ *Săptămîna*, January 25, 1980.

¹⁷ N. Petre Vrânceanu, *op. cit.*, 85.

¹⁸ Vasile Pop Negreșteanu, *Tovarășul Nicolae Ceaușescu în dialog cu locuitorii județului Călărași* (Comrade Nicolae Ceaușescu in dialogue with the inhabitants of Călărași county), 1988.

way. On the contrary, the scene looks like a classic veneration tableau in which Ceaușescu passively receives the admiration of his people. He is represented isolated in the centre of the painting, in a stereotyped attitude of salute which gives the impression of rigidity and aloofness. The gesture also resembles the posture in which the mediaeval leaders were represented in their votive portraits: indicating with their arms the painted model of their foundation, the church, and dedicating it to God. This is probably the real source of inspiration for Ceaușescu's gesture as Negreșteanu was one of the painters who employed in his painting the flat style and the rigid postures that were characteristic of church painting. Ceaușescu's very bright outfit and the source of light that seems to radiate from below and to enfold him together set him apart in the painting. Moreover, the arrangement of the people around the leader and their gestures directed towards him (turned towards him, gazing at him, offering him flowers and bread, applauding him) contribute further to his individualisation. All these elements make us think of a possible influence of the icon painting in the construction of this composition.

The features distinguished by Boris Uspensky¹⁹ as the five basic characteristics of the representation of figures within an icon could be easily identified in Negreșteanu's work as well. Uspensky maintains that the arrangement of the figures within an icon usually respects the following five rules: (1) frontality, (2) the relative size of the central figure, (3) the right-left distribution with respect to the central figure, (4) the relative dynamics of the figures depicted and (5) the relative position of the figures with respect to the person viewing the icon. All principles described by Uspensky are addressed in Negreșteanu's painting: the distribution of people around Ceaușescu, his distinct individualisation through outfits and light (and not through size this time as it happens in other works representing Ceaușescu), the clear, almost aligned representation of all figures with respect to the viewer along with their coherent gazes and movements towards the centre of the image (Ceaușescu). In addition, interesting elements such as the rainbow or the dove

¹⁹ Boris Uspensky, *The Semiotics of the Russian Icon* (Lisse: The Peter de Ridder Press, 1976).

positioned right above Ceaușescu contribute to the saturation of this work with allusions to religious visual patterns.

But this painting touches upon another essential trait of the old icon painting, namely the representation of totality, wholeness, unity. This feature of the icon art was adopted in the first socialist realist representations.²⁰ In this particular depiction of Ceaușescu it became very schematic yet obvious. The unity, the totality are conveyed here through the representation of different social and age categories (we simply can identify in the painting the workers, peasants, intellectuals, pioneers, etc). In this way, Ceaușescu becomes indeed the leader of the whole Romania being praised by a whole nation.

Apart from this mystical dimension of the cult of Ceaușescu, there was also a very distinct one that drew on his merits as the communist leader of the country. Within this direction two 'qualities' of Ceaușescu were ceaselessly stressed: his remarkable theoretical contribution to the development of Marxist-Leninist theory and his role as the founder of the new Romania. Ceaușescu was described as a 'prominent exponent of the contemporary social sciences' because of his 'conceptions and ideas ...that have gained universal recognition and have been promoted powerfully in the international circuit of ideas'.²¹ The propaganda apparatus emphasised this important aspect of Ceaușescu's multi-faceted personality by extensively publishing his 'theoretical writings' both in Romania and abroad. A series entitled 'From the philosophical thought of the President of Romania, Nicolae Ceaușescu' was printed that included his remarks on various issues: the role of the nation and the party in the communist society, the revolutionary conception of the working class, tendencies and directions in the economic, social and political development of the socialist society, etc. His outstanding theoretical contribution was rewarded with several doctoral degrees in Romania and even more *doctor honoris causa* titles

²⁰ Lars Erik Blomqvist, 'Some Utopian Elements in Stalinist Art', *Russian History*, Vol. 11. Nos. 2-3, Summer-Fall 1984, 299-300.

²¹ *Nicolae Ceaușescu, ctitor al economiei socialiste românești* (București: Ed. Politică, 1987), 31.

abroad.²² He started to be praised gradually not only as the most important Marxist-Leninist thinker, but also as the most gifted philosopher that Romania had produced, the one who put the country on the map of the world's culture.²³ Besides the ceaseless underling of Ceaușescu's theoretical contribution to Marxist-Leninist theory, another important feature was promoted by Romanian propaganda. Ceaușescu's theoretical writings were even more valuable as they were not the fruit of sterile thinking but of his 'revolutionary experience gained during over 55 years of fight and activity'.²⁴ Moreover, his theories and thoughts did not remain dead letter but were applied in various fields. Ceaușescu not only was the generator of these ideas but also the one who implemented them by active and permanent advice.

The accent put on the description of Ceaușescu as an active thinker is more evident in his visual representations. As far as we are aware, Ceaușescu was never represented sitting at his desk and writing. In spite of his enormous theoretical production and of the accent put by propaganda on his contribution to the development of Marxist-Leninist theory, the phase of actual writing never became a theme of interest to artists. Instead they focused on the dissemination of his ideas. Two main hypostases emerged as representative for this direction. The first was the depiction of Ceaușescu in the posture of a public speaker. This hypostasis is rather stereotyped and it renders Ceaușescu - as we have seen, for instance, previously in Piliuță's work (PLATE 2) - while he gives a speech or receives recognition (applause) for it. The second hypostasis focuses on the moment when Ceaușescu's ideas are implemented. The putting into practice of Ceaușescu's ideas always took

²² For instance, in 1978 alone, on the occasion of his 60th birthday, he was presented with two doctoral degrees: Doctor in Political Sciences and Doctor in Economics. See *Omagiu* (Bucharest: Meridiane, 1978). For a complete list of the awards and titles internationally earned up to 1983 see Robert Maxwell (ed.), *Nicolae Ceaușescu, Builder of Modern Romania and International Statesman* (Oxford: Pergamon Press, 1983).

²³ 'The Nicolae Ceaușescu Epoch represents not only a social progress without equivalent in the millenary history of the Romanian people, but it inscribes our country in the universal patrimony of the philosophical and political creation with the most substantial Romanian theoretical contribution yet, due to the innovative and creative thought of the President of Romania.', *Nicolae Ceaușescu, căitor al economiei socialiste românești* (București: Ed. Politică, 1987), 37.

²⁴ Ibid.

This resembles very well Stalin's position as the most important Marxist-Leninist philosopher who applied his theoretical thought to the Soviet reality. Robert Tucker, *op. cit.*, 149.

place in a highly ritualised scenario in which the Romanian leader became the main actor that performed in front of an obedient audience. This hypostasis crystallised over time in a distinct theme whose purpose was to emphasise the successful implementation of 'the Ceaușescu doctrine'. The 'work visit' theme was probably the most complex and dynamic theme within the iconography of the Romanian leader, the one that followed most accurately the changes registered in Ceaușescu's leadership.

From the image of the Marxist-Leninist thinker, whose ideas became even more valuable as they had a practical applicability, propaganda moved towards the image of the founder of modern Romania. Due to his constant intervention in and supervision of bigger or smaller projects, Ceaușescu began to be perceived as the founder of communist Romania, the one who designed and implemented the essential lines of development. Propaganda employed the terms *architect* and *founder* in order to underline his deep, decisive impact on the transformation of Romania into a new socialist country. He became the 'The Great Architect of our present and future development'²⁵, 'the architect and constructor of our country', 'the one who gave a new face to our country'²⁶ He was also the 'founder of modern Romania' or the 'founder of the socialist Romanian economy'.²⁷ It is interesting to note that the word used in Romanian was that of *ctitor*, a word with old resonance as it was the one employed to describe the founding activity of the mediaeval *voievozi*. This sheds light on the way Ceaușescu's image as a founder was conceived, on its deep and all-embracing influence on Romania.

1.1.2. The Native Village - Site of Pilgrimage

²⁵ Mircea Herivan, 'Umanismul revoluționar', in *Uniți în cuget și-n simțiri* (București: Ed. Eminescu, 1984), 30.

²⁶ *Arhitect și constructor de țară, Omagiu tovarășului Nicolae Ceaușescu* (București: Ed. Eminescu, 1987).

²⁷ Dumitru Radu Popescu, 'Viziune profund umanistă despre misiunea literaturii', in *Uniți în cuget* ..., 7.

Ceaușescu was born on January 26, 1918, in a small village in the Oltenia region of Walachia, called Scornicești. Both his date and place of birth were to generate vivid interpretations and commentaries. Much was speculated on his date of birth that took place between the October Revolution and the Great Union of the three Romanian Principalities (December 1, 1918).²⁸ Furthermore, it was only a couple of days after the date of the 1859 Union of Moldavia and Walachia (January 24, 1859). His birth at the intersection of so many important dates (both international and national) was regarded as a premonitory sign for what was to become the child born under so auspicious stars and described in terms that reminded the coming into the world of the chosen ones:

A blessed soil: Scornicești ... With the sweet sound of the clock striking, a day in January 60 years ago brought the annunciation of the birth of the beloved son ... The sun shone mildly on all those living in Scornicești when the house of the industrious peasant Andruța Ceaușescu and of the good mother Alexandra was filled by mirth, joy, and hope with the birth of the boy Nicolae...²⁹

In the seventies and especially in the eighties, the village became the recipient of concentrated attention from Ceaușescu himself and from propagandists, writers and artists who contributed to the development of the cult in the direction that the Romanian leader had pointed to. First of all, the process of transforming the site into one worthy of such an illustrious off-spring was conducted by the members of Ceaușescu's family who held high positions at the local level. Moreover, large amounts of money were pumped into the process as well as into the annual manifestations that aimed to celebrate the village and its most famous 'son'. Secondly, the President himself gave special consideration to the fostering of a tradition around his birthday place. He periodically visited his native house which was transformed into a memorial. These visits took place especially on the occasion

²⁸ 'The same year gave birth in fight to a new country/And to a forehead burning deeply, visionary/Towards the revolutionary future/Under the leading socialist star.', N. Petre Vrânceanu, 'O țară și un bărbat se nasc prin vreme', in *Un cititor de istorie...*, 85.

²⁹ Vasile Sălăjan, cited in Anneli Ute Gabanyi, *op. cit.*, 32.

of his birthday celebration and followed more or less the same pattern. Besides the mandatory welcome moment, the visit included two episodes that were especially conceived in order to underline certain facets of Ceaușescu's image. The first episode was a tour of the Museum of Scornicești. The second consisted in a visit to the native house and in paying tribute to the graves of his parents.

Both moments received large coverage in the press.³⁰ The visit to the Scornicești Museum was employed by the official propaganda in order to establish a link between Ceaușescu and the 'history' of his birth place and also to reinforce the official version of history with the help of 'material proofs'. The museum mainly exhibited 'Dacian remains', evidence of continuity of the Romanians on the territory of today Romania. Furthermore, the artefacts exhibited in the museum aimed at presenting the inhabitants of Scornicești as participants to the major events of the XIXth and XXth century Romanian history: the 1821 and 1848 revolutions, the 1877 War of Independence and the 1907 peasant uprising. In order to cover 'properly' the span of time between the Dacians' period and the 'documented' participations in the events of the XIXth century, a local captain called Ceașu (!) was invented³¹, who presumably fought in the army of Mihai Viteazul, the unifier of the three Romanian Principalities in 1600.³² Needless to say that this fabrication aimed at establishing a linkage between Ceaușescu and his ideological forerunner, Mihai Viteazul who was perceived by the Romanian leader as the utmost embodiment of leadership, unifier and defender of national interest.

The visit to the native house and to the graves of his parents aimed at shaping a different facet of Ceausescu's image: his power to overcome his humble condition

³⁰ *Scînteia* January 29, 1978.

³¹ Michel-Pierre Hamelet, a journalist on *Le Figaro*, wrote in 1971 a highly laudatory book devoted to Ceaușescu. The particular episode described above is slightly different in Hamelet's book, in the sense that the captain Ceașu is replaced by four un-named captains who fought under the flag of the same Mihail Viteazul. Hamelet's book was published in 1971, at a time when the episode was not yet fully crystallised; in time, the four captains were to be condensed in one with a telling name. See Michel-Pierre Hamelet, *Nicolae Ceaușescu avec ses textes essentiels* (Paris: Seghers, 1971), 9.

³² Ion Petcu, *Ceaușescu, un fanatic al puterii, Biografie neretușată* (Bucharest: Ed. Românul, 1994), 136 and Lavinia Betea, *Psihologie politică, Individ, lider, mulțime în regimul communist* (Iași: Polirom, 2001), 159.

and to transform himself into the leader of Romania. Whereas the image of the village was preserved as evidence of Ceausescu's peasant origin, the accent was put on his capacity to overcome his initial condition, to become aware of the existent social inequality and to fight against it. For instance, a laudatory article published on the occasion of Ceausescu's 60th birthday underlined precisely the afore-mentioned transformation:

Ceaușescu was born a PEASANT... He became a WORKER... He learned, learned tirelessly, he is an INTELLECTUAL... This triple nature: peasant, worker, intellectual; this is what seems to us to be the 'key' that 'deciphers' Comrade Nicolae Ceaușescu's great personality.³³

In other words, Ceausescu was perfectly equipped for an adequate understanding of Romania's reality, he knew equally well the peasants' and the workers' problems. He also had the capacity to design plans and to initiate change. The entire effort put into depicting Ceaușescu as a peasant's son of humble origin as well as the attempt to construct a genealogy – both personal and at the level of local identity – fall into a well defined scheme of articulating the image of a national hero. As Jean-Pierre Albert remarks:

Les héros doivent se situer du côté du 'peuple' par leur origine, leur distance aux sphères dirigeantes ou encore leur position de victime d'un pouvoir jugé étranger.³⁴

Ceaușescu's interest in his native place was reinforced by the attention intellectuals and propagandists paid to the little village. They started to pay visits to the leader's birthplace and to describe various aspects of the history and life of the village or to extol Ceaușescu's childhood.³⁵ Writers and poets glorified the birth of the great

³³ *Scînteia*, January 26, 1978, cited in Anneli Ute Gabanyi, *op. cit.*, 31.

³⁴ Jean-Pierre Albert, 'Du martyr à la star, Les metamorphoses des héros nationaux', in Pierre Centlivres, Daniel Fabre and Françoise Zonabend (eds.), *La Fabrique des héros* (Paris: Editions de la Maison des sciences de l'homme, 1998), 25.

³⁵ *Scînteia*, January 9, 1978.

leader,³⁶ whereas the painters picked up the theme of the native house. In the last chapter of this dissertation we will analyse the metamorphoses of this theme in painting and the different ways in which it can be interpreted. Suffice to mention at this point the manner in which the theme of the native house was visually employed in *Arta* review, the review of the Romanian Artists' Union. In a 1984 issue, the most famous depiction of the native house³⁷ (Figure 3) was juxtaposed with two paintings that represented the president of Romania, Nicolae Ceausescu and his wife, Elena Ceausescu, respectively (Figure 4). The central painting depicts Nicolae Ceaușescu along with his wife standing tranquilly and cheerfully in the porch of Ceaușescu's native home.³⁸ The painting representing Nicolae Ceausescu - on the left side of the central painting - renders the Romanian leader in the hypostasis of a 'royal president', with a firm grip on the sceptre he holds in both his hands, the three-coloured sash adorning his firmly held torso and the gaze directed towards the right of the image (the future) as every visionary leader would have done.³⁹ On the other side, Elena Ceausescu is depicted as the world famous scientist.⁴⁰ She wears a doctor *honoris causa* robe and holds in her hands not a book but a diploma. The syntax employed in this montage by the editors of *Arta* visually conveys the idea expressed above. It puts the accent on the contrast between the Ceaușescus' humble origin and their later achievements. It aims at underlining the process of becoming, of overcoming, of transforming themselves into two totally accomplished persons, models and luminaries in their specific fields.

1.1.3. *The Perfect Leader and his Doctored Biography*

³⁶ 'Country met History in a village/The child had to breath the light/Along with his people's sorrow/In the moment of his birth./And the child was born!', Constantin Oprică, 'Genesis', in *Un ctitor de istorie...* 187.

³⁷ Adrian Dumitrache, *Casa părintească* (Native Home), 1984. The work was commissioned for the 1984 'Cîntarea României' exhibition that took place in Dalles Hall, Bucharest. Published in the 10th issue of *Arta* in 1984.

³⁸ Although, as far as we know there are not painted representations of Elena Ceaușescu's birthday place, her village became an object of 'journalistic attention' in the second half of the eighties. See Anneli Maier, 'Visiting Petrești, the Place where the Ceaușescu Romance Began', September 25, 1986, Open Society Archives, *fond* 300-60-1, Box 700.

³⁹ Ion Octavian Penda, *Portret* (Portrait), *Arta*, 1/1984.

⁴⁰ Natalia Matei Teodorescu, *Portret* (Portrait), *Arta*, 1/1984.

A perfect leader like Ceaușescu had to have a perfect biography. Since very few moments in Ceaușescu's biography presented the leader in a favourable light, a massive re-writing had to be undertaken. The most troublesome chapter was his late childhood marked by his leaving of the native village for Bucharest.⁴¹ The episode was explained within the larger context of Ceaușescu's precocious awareness of class inequality and his quest for making a difference for those around him. Thus, Ceaușescu began his career as a 'professional revolutionary' at only 11.⁴² One more task for propagandists was that of accommodating the period of isolation due to long imprisonment terms with that in which the future leader played an active role in the organisation of the anti-fascist movement.⁴³ A further complicating factor was the already prominent role ascribed to Gheorghe Gheorghiu-Dej by the official propaganda of the previous regime.⁴⁴

The issue was solved through the employment of two converging strategies. Firstly, the role played by the prison leaders in the organisation of the anti-fascist insurrection was silently overlooked. Gheorghe Gheorghiu-Dej was practically erased from the picture. Additionally, the image of the 'liberating Red Army', already diminished by the previous regime, was further underplayed. Ultimately, the role played by 'the Romanian people' was accordingly exaggerated. As Ceaușescu's

⁴¹ Common wisdom has it that it was a pure and simple flight from home, followed by a period of wandering through Bucharest and of supporting himself through small 'favours' performed for different persons or even through robbery. His first arrest is said that occurred as a result of one of these 'favours' that Ceaușescu made to a stranger. He was asked to carry a briefcase (with communist leaflets) to a given address without his knowing what it contained.

⁴² Lavinia Betea remarks the similarities between Ceaușescu's and Kim Ir Sen's biographies, especially as their premature preoccupation with politics is concerned. Whilst Kim Ir Sen purportedly had elaborated a plan of liberating Korea at the age of thirteen, Ceaușescu's biographers pushed the date of his political involvement down to eleven. As Ceaușescu neither participated in any revolution nor led a war for the liberation of his country, the emphasis was put on his acute perception of reality, the sympathy towards those unjustly marginalised and his determination to improve things. Lavinia Betea, *op. cit.*, 154.

⁴³ The imprisonment terms were real. Ceaușescu spent in total six years in prison up to the age of twenty-six. The most notorious places of detention were Doftana and Tîrgu-Jiu, where Ceaușescu met the communists who were to form the Romanian nucleus of power after 1944 as opposed to those who came to Romania 'on the Soviet tanks'.

⁴⁴ For Gheorghiu-Dej's role see Dumitru Simulescu, 'Formațiunile de luptă patriotice în insurecția populară antifascistă', *Scînteia*, August 12, 1964; Ion Rasoviceanu & Dumitru Vițelceanu, 'Unitățile armatei române în acțiune', *Scînteia*, August 14, 1964; Mihail Roșianu, 'Cum a fost organizată evadarea tovarășului Gheorghe Gheorghiu-Dej din lagărul de la Tîrgu-Jiu în august 1944', *Scînteia*, August 18, 1964.

image gradually identified with that of the people, his role in the preparation and carrying out of the 1944 insurrection gained weight. Nevertheless, it was only a 'diffuse' part as he had never been ascribed a role similar to that 'performed' by Dej; it was rather a place gained due to lack of suitable competitors. Secondly, certain moments were rewritten in order to grant to Ceaușescu a more favourable position. His role was either amplified or radically altered. One episode subjected to rewriting in order to enhance Ceaușescu's personal role was the 1936 trial that took place in Brașov. Ceaușescu, along with other members of the group accused of communist propaganda, defied the Military Tribunal by refusing to cooperate, confronting the judge and accusing the bourgeois, obedient legal system. His role is proved by an article published in the press of that time by a young journalist, Eugen Jebeleanu, who was to become an important poet during the communist regime. From that presumably unbiased description of the Tribunal's session it emerges that Ceaușescu backed the protest initiated by another comrade who had challenged the authority of the court.⁴⁵ Post-1965 propaganda operated an elimination of the other protagonists of the episode and transformed it into a solo performance.

The episodes rewritten from top to bottom were Ceaușescu's admission into the Romanian Antifascist Committee, and his role in the demonstration that took place in Bucharest on May 1, 1939. Ceaușescu's admission into the Romanian Antifascist Committee is not documented at all. The episode seems to be completely fabricated by the official propaganda in order to offer to Ceaușescu the desired role as a leader even before he actually became one. According to Ceaușescu's official biography,⁴⁶ at his first participation in the meetings of the Romanian Antifascist Committee, he not only was admitted to the Committee, but also – due to his fiery speech and evident maturity – was directly elected as a member in the leadership of the Romanian Antifascist Committee. According to Pavel Câmpeanu, Ceaușescu did not even succeed in entering the meeting's hall as a result of some delays in the

⁴⁵ Eugen Jebeleanu, 'Impresii dela un proces', *Lumea Nouă*, April 19, 1936.

⁴⁶ Ceaușescu's biography, once fully edited, was circulated in an unchanged form, encompassing invariably the same episodes. It appeared always in the big homage volumes that were periodically published by State propaganda.

meeting's program. He was presumably part of a delegation representing the Youth Culture House of the *Foișorul de Foc*⁴⁷ zone. The delegation was supposed to present their salute and commitment to the antifascist fight in the name of the young generation.⁴⁸

The second falsified episode regards the 1st of May demonstration in 1939. In this case the distortion is complete for the demonstration itself had not been organised by communists but by the royal dictatorship that confiscated the workers' day and employed it as a manifestation of the regime's 'political recognition' of the national-socialist systems in Germany and Italy.⁴⁹ Consequently, communists' participation in this demonstration and Ceaușescu's ascribed role within it are pure fabrications of communist propaganda.⁵⁰

1.2. Conquering 'Time' – The Immortal National Leader

Apart from the classic forms of the Ceaușescu's cult briefly identified above, the leader of Romania was also the object of more sophisticated forms of 'worship'. This is not to say that similar forms cannot be identified within the other communist regimes or dictatorships in even more remote time. The peculiarity of these forms consists in their perfect adaptation to the Romanian reality, as well as in Ceaușescu's personal interest and involvement in their continuous refinement and amplification. The historical commemorations and the architectural transformation of the country became the favourite activities of Ceaușescu. Both of them were employed by propaganda apparatus as part of Ceaușescu's cult. In fact, the commemorative ceremonies of past historical figures and events was gradually

⁴⁷ Zone in the centre of Bucharest.

⁴⁸ Pavel Câmpeanu, *Ceaușescu, anii numărătorii inverse* (Iași: Polirom, 2002), 34.

⁴⁹ 'Thousands of participants amassed in a line that went down on the Victory Road towards the Palace, where, following the fascist fashion, [people] saluted Carol II [...] with their arms stretched and [he] responded to them with the same gesture.', Pavel Câmpeanu, *op. cit.*, 35.

⁵⁰ The official version describes the episode as 'a grandiose demonstration, the biggest of this kind in the Europe of that time, against the fascist barbarism and war, against the country's binding to foreign interests...', Ilie Purcaru, 'Eroul', in *Un ctitor de istorie...*, 10.

More on this episode in chapter 5, 240-242.

overshadowed and confiscated by the growing cult of the leader. Architectural constructions were meant both to testify to Ceaușescu's capacity to change profoundly and visibly the appearance of the country and to preserve his name over time. Each of those 'masked' forms of worshiping the leader tended to appropriate one temporal dimension: the *past* was to be mastered by arbitrary and self-beneficial utilisation of commemorating events, the *future* was to be forever permeated with the leader's presence in the form of his imprint upon the country's face. In other words, Ceaușescu attempted to conquer 'time'.

Before analysing at length the commemorative mechanisms and architectural construction as forms of Ceaușescu's cult, we shall scrutinise in the following section the relationship between time and the construction of the leader cult in communist regimes. In addition, we shall attempt to explore how historical memory was used in the process of building up the communist leader's image.

1.2.1. The Dead Leader and Frozen Time

We would like to start by pointing to a paradox. Within the communist system, the first cult built up around a leading figure was devoted to a deceased person: Lenin. This banal occurrence - the fact that the 'beneficiary' of the cult was a defunct person - had important consequences, in our opinion, for the manner in which the cult of the leader in its communist guise was further shaped. First of all, the situation gave enormous freedom to those who instrumented the Lenin's cult to advance solutions that would have been otherwise dismissed as incongruous with the Marxist creeds. It is well known that Lenin, apart from his Plan of Monumental Propaganda which aimed at honouring deceased cultural and political personalities, was very much against any forms of overt praise of living individuals.⁵¹ It is

⁵¹ John E. Bowl, 'Russian Sculpture and Lenin's Plan of Monumental Propaganda', in Henry A. Millon and Linda Nochlin (eds.), *Art and Architecture in the Service of Politics*, (Cambridge, Massachusetts, and London: The MIT Press, 1980); Matthew Cullerne Bown, *Art under Stalin* (Oxford: Phaidon Press, 1991), 23-27; Christina Lodder, 'Lenin's Plan for Monumental Propaganda', in Matthew Cullerne Bown and Brandon Taylor (eds.), *Art of the Soviets, Painting, sculpture and architecture in a one-party state, 1917-1992* (Manchester and New York: Manchester University

therefore even more awkward that he was the one to become the object of an unprecedented type of cult. Secondly, the cult established around Lenin tested the population's response and level of acceptance of certain solutions and, more importantly, dismissed forever another set of solutions as unacceptable. To use a different phrasing, the cult of Lenin established a pattern that was to be imitated and surpassed by most of the communist cults that followed. The discussions about the best way to remember the deceased leader were vivid and the solutions proposed palpably different.⁵² The best encapsulation of the possible ways of remembering Lenin is contained in an article written by Rodchenko, the Russian avant-garde artist. The text reads:

Tell me frankly, what ought to remain of Lenin:

an art bronze,

oil portraits,

etchings,

watercolours

his secretary's diary, his friends' memoirs-

or

a file of photographs taken of him at work and rest,

archives of his books, writing pads, notebooks, shorthand reports,

films, phonograph records?⁵³

The distinction between an untouchable Lenin, transposed and idealised in traditional media and a Lenin as close as possible to the real one, available through photographs and objects that he created and used is evident. A Lenin rendered

Press, 1993); Nils Åke Nilsson, 'Spring 1918. The Arts and the Commissars', in Nils Åke Nilsson (ed.), *Art, Society, Revolution. Russia 1917-1921* (Stockholm: Almqvist & Wiksell International, 1979), 41-48.

⁵² Olga Velikanova, *Making of an Idol: on Uses of Lenin* (Göttingen, Zurich: Muster, Schmidt, Verlag, 1996).

⁵³ Leah Dickerman, 'Lenin in the Age of Mechanical Reproduction', in Michael S. Roth and Charles G. Salas (eds.) *Disturbing Remains: Memory, History, and Crisis in the Twentieth Century* (Los Angeles: The Getty Research Institute, 2001), 94.

through the agency of photographs and personal objects would have allowed the dissemination of his image in its multiplicity and discontinuity.⁵⁴ Furthermore, not only that this multi-faceted image of Lenin would have implied the idea of authenticity, but also that of concrete death, past, absence, as the photographs speak mainly about what was and no longer exists. This alternative way of remembering Lenin, proposed and backed mainly by the artists gathered around the avant-garde journal *Lef*, was not accepted by the Immortalisation Commission, created shortly after Lenin's death. Instead, the variant of an icon-like Lenin was strongly supported by those in power (see for this his mummification, mausoleum, rituals of collective mourning, etc).⁵⁵ The solution advanced had a few important consequences that, we argue, influenced the construction of the leader's image as well as the rituals practised within the communist systems. It might be regarded as hazardous attributing such a great importance to this causality, but we have to bear in mind that the communist systems were entirely controlled from the top, that there was little room, if none, for spontaneity or challenging the already established structures. In other words, these commemorative patterns once established were reproduced in various circumstances with minimal adaptations.

Now going back to the consequences, we would say that the most important concerned the issue of time. It is true that the poor management of time was one of the major deficiencies of the communist system in general. It is again right to affirm that the accent put on the future, on the 'how it ought to be' dimension was an intrinsic characteristic of communist ideology. What we would like nevertheless to suggest is that the cult of Lenin, practiced in that frozen temporal form, introduced a different temporal dimension that contrasted with the general 'marching forward' conception of time in the communist ideology and that practically isolated the leader and his cult in a kind of temporal envelope. The manner in which Lenin was to be remembered, his mummification and permanent, solemn display induced a feeling of a-temporality or, more accurately said, a constriction of time. This, we would

⁵⁴ Ibid., 95.

⁵⁵ Nina Tumarkin, *Lenin Lives! The Lenin Cult in Soviet Russia* (Cambridge, Massachusetts, and London, England: Harvard University Press, 1983).

suggest further, made easier the manoeuvring of temporal units, a process that was unparalleled in modern times. Time had no longer a linear dimension, but rather a static, compressed one in which every moment seemed to be within an arm's reach. This conception of time altered the perception of historical time as well and facilitated the manoeuvring of different historical periods, their appropriation, the arbitrary intervention upon them. They began to seem familiar, interchangeable. The Romanian sociologist, Pavel Câmpeanu, captured this idea as follows:

Becoming is replaced by unending repetition. Eviscerated of its substance, history itself becomes a-temporal. Perpetual movement gives way to perpetual immobility.⁵⁶

A second consequence of the post-mortem cult of Lenin (as well as of the fact that his cult was established in its main forms in the immediate aftermath of Lenin's death, a period of deep emotional density) was the pronounced commemorative character of the cult and the important role memory played within it. The outpouring of personal memories about Lenin, intermingling with a collectively channelled process of remembering Lenin, eventually resulted in an over-sized image of the deceased leader. Furthermore, the particular emphasis on remembering, at least in its initial phase, put in motion a comparing and dismissing mechanism, whose main outcome was the placement of Lenin at the top of the hierarchy as the quintessential leader. In other words, in an attempt to insert Lenin historically, all other historical figures who might have claimed a symbolic space in the national pantheon were subordinated to him.

A third important consequence, which is in fact very much linked to the previous one, regards the character of completeness, of fully developed figure of the leader.

⁵⁶ Pavel Câmpeanu, *The origins of Stalinism: From Leninist revolution to Stalinist society* (Armonk, New York: M. E. Sharpe), 22. See for a more detailed discussion on the 'flattening of time' in communist Romania Katherine Verdery, *National Ideology Under Socialism, Identity and Cultural Politics in Ceaușescu's Romania* (Berkeley/Los Angeles/Oxford: University of California Press, 1991), 249-250 and, by the same author, 'The 'Etatization' of Time in Ceaușescu's Romania', in *What Was Socialism, and What Comes Next?* (Princeton, New Jersey: Princeton University Press, 1996).

Even when represented as a youngster or a child, Lenin was already an accomplished person/leader, the centre of the episode narrated, the example that should be followed. He was not becoming, developing; he was at any moment Lenin - The Leader. The most elaborated personality cults that followed within the communist systems strove to render the leader not as a becoming human being, but as an already fulfilled personality.⁵⁷ As a result of this tendency, the communist leader's biography as well as the epithets used to describe him aimed at depicting the leader in his un-becoming, a-temporal perfection.

1.2.2. Ceaușescu and the Constriction of 'Time'

Ceaușescu's cult was a mixture of nationalist rhetoric, manipulation of historical memory and constriction of 'time'. It was forged from the beginning in a historical perspective and it shamelessly appropriated past figures and events according to the features of Ceaușescu's personality they served to emphasise. Furthermore, it employed a strong nationalist rhetoric not only as a means of legitimating the regime and fuelling popular support but also because Ceaușescu himself was one of its most fervent promoters. Within this process of rewriting history in a nationalist guise, Romanians were 'taught' *what* to remember from their history and most of all *how* to remember. Ceaușescu quickly understood what Paul Connerton stated much later, that the 'control of a society's memory largely conditions the hierarchy of power'.⁵⁸ But a hierarchy of power does not resist if it is not anchored in 'time'. Therefore, the Romanian communist regime operated a remodelling of time and

⁵⁷ Katerina Clark noted this aspect in the construction of Stalin's image. Stalin was 'of a different temporal order – of being, rather than becoming...', Katerina Clark, *Petersburg, Crucible of Cultural Revolution* (Cambridge, Massachusetts: Harvard University Press, 1995), 302. Nevertheless in 'Socialist Realism and the Sacralizing of Space', Clark makes the distinction between Lenin who is representing in a 'state of *becoming* ... and Stalin ... in a state of *being*', referring to the ways the two leaders are represented in paintings or movies. While her observation is perfectly valid with reference to the different manners of depicting Lenin (in a sort of motion or leaning forward) and Stalin (motionless, statue-like), our remark refers to the constructed personality of the leader in general, who shows maturity and moral integrity from the beginning to the end. Katerina Clark, 'Socialist Realism and the Sacralizing of Space', in Evgeny Dobrenko & Eric Naiman. (eds.), *The Landscape of Stalinism, The Art and Ideology of Soviet Space* (Seattle and London: University of Washington Press), 13.

⁵⁸ Paul Connerton, *How Societies Remember* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1989), 1.

historical memory according to its own agenda, stressing those moments that could contribute to the substantiation of the Ceaușescu regime.

First of all, the manipulation of historical memory took place at very high levels as some of the changes, accents or omissions were directly instructed from above. The purpose of those changes was primarily the shift from a history integrated in the international communist movement to a national one, in which the independence of the Romanian people and the role of its leader were particularly stressed. Ceaușescu's intervention was manifested through issue of decrees that practically altered the interpretation of historical events or through simple references in his speeches that were further addressed by Party ideologues and historians. He gradually became the main expert in the history of the Romanian people, as happened in various other fields.

Ceaușescu's intrusion in the field of history is proved by apparently minor facts that go beyond the level of direct intervention. Katherine Verdery, the American anthropologist who produced the most extended study on nationalist discourse in Romania so far, identifies more subtle evidences of Ceaușescu's intervention in and disdain for the historiography practised by specialists. For instance, analysing Ceaușescu's *History of Romania*, a collection of his speeches, Verdery observes that the chronological structure of the book – which respects the historical sequence of the events commented upon – is disregarded by the manner in which Ceaușescu's speeches are inserted in each chapter. They are assembled in the chronological order of their enunciation as speeches.⁵⁹ Furthermore, the volume, which is designed as a guide for professional historians, encompasses a ten page long bibliography that lists a single author: Ceaușescu.⁶⁰ All these support the idea advanced initially that the control of time and memory was intrinsically linked with the personality cult.

⁵⁹ 'That is, an event of 1300 A.D. mentioned in a speech from 1968 will precede an event of 350 B.C. mentioned in a speech of 1969. What better evidence of the Party's desire for mastery over time, its capacity to redefine the entire dimension of temporality in human affairs?', Katherine Verdery, *National Ideology Under Socialism...*, 250.

⁶⁰ Ibid, 251.

Secondly, the regime's propaganda apparatus turned its attention towards ancient history and attempted to construct a past that would fall in line with the declared independence of the regime. The historical period that particularly became the regime's privileged field of investigation was that of Antiquity, more precisely the foundation of the 'first unitary and centralised state' under the leadership of the Dacian king Burebista in 44 B.C., as a Central Committee decision simply declared.⁶¹ It should be said from the beginning that the concrete archaeological evidence related to the existence of Dacians on the territory of modern day Romania is very scarce, mainly indirect testimonies from Greek historians. Nevertheless, the activists as well as historians embarked upon producing 'proofs' of the greatness, spiritual development and military achievements of Dacians. The results of this trend were more often than not ridiculous. A Dacian language was invented worth being studied in the University, an advanced religion was articulated which transformed the territory of Romania into the cradle of the European civilisation, the historians within the Institute of the Party's History struggled to depict Dacians' democratic fight against the imperialist Romans, and so on. All these manipulations had very specific purposes: to point to similarities between the kingdom of Burebista and the leadership of Ceaușescu in terms of independence, worldwide prestige and achievements; to portray Ceaușescu as the leader of one of the oldest and developed peoples in Europe; to downplay Hungary's revisionist tendencies over Transylvania.

Thirdly, the regime's manipulation of history had two more results. As the Romanian historian Lucian Boia puts it, Romanian history was personalised to an unprecedented degree and the national pantheon was repopulated in accordance with the desired message to transmit.⁶² The regime gave a special importance to past personalities who could best convey the idea of sovereignty, independence and

⁶¹ Vlad Georgescu, *Politică și istorie: Cazul comuniștilor români 1944-1977* (Munich: Jon Dumitru-Verlag, 1981), 65, Alexandru Zub, *Orizont închis, Istoriografia română sub comunism* (Iași: Institutul European, 2000), 82, Keith Hitchins, 'Romania', *The American Historical Review*, vol. 97, Issue 4, October 1992, 1081-1082, Lucian Boia, *History and Myth in Romanian Consciousness* (Budapest: Central European University, 2001), 78-79.

⁶² Lucian Boia, *op. cit.*, 226.

authority as well as that of a rule full of achievements. The figures chosen were also seen as true saviours, who altered the course of history and succeeded in pushing the country towards peaks never reached until their rules. Ceaușescu became the last and, in a perfect evolutionist scheme, the most important personage of Romanian history, announced by an illustrious lineage of sovereigns.⁶³

Every single moment and historical figure that was singled out and modelled according to Party ideology was commemorated through State sponsored and orchestrated celebrations. A calendar of celebrations that covered the whole year was put together. Katherine Verdery speaks about the 'arhythmia of these ritual temporalities' as the ancient religious ceremonies and festivals were replaced by 'this year the two hundredth anniversary of the enthronement of Prince X, next year the four hundredth anniversary of the birthday of Hero Y'.⁶⁴ Her argument is of course valid if we look at the contrast between the old and the new calendars. But if we investigate closer the new calendar and we notice that the personage present – more or less discretely – in all those year-round celebrations was Ceaușescu himself, we get a sense of repetition, of rhythmicity even. Regardless of the historical figure or moment commemorated within those celebrations, Ceaușescu ended up as the focus of each one of them. The appropriation of those commemorations took place in two ways. Firstly, there was the clear stated linkage between Ceaușescu and the event or figure celebrated, with the implied idea that the communist leader fulfilled roundly whatever had not been totally accomplished due to adverse historical conditions. Secondly, even when the linkage mentioned above was not soundly affirmed, the simple fact that he (and his wife gradually) was/were the main

⁶³ This seems to be a recurrent feature of the totalitarian regimes. For instance, Mussolini saw himself as a continuer of the Roman imperial glory and he cultivated and appropriated the cults of Hercules and Augustus. A colossal bronze sculpture representing Mussolini as Hercules was designed to adorn the center of the newly planned forum in the centre of Rome (un-realised project), while a statue of Hercules was placed at the entrance of Stadio Mussolini (*Stadio dei marmi*) at Foro Mussolini (*Italic*). See Denis Mack Smith, *Mussolini* (London: Weidenfeld & Nicolson, 1981), 137. By the same token, Stalin constructed his image in close connection with those of past national heroes. He encouraged and manipulated the re-emergence of some historical figures as a backdrop for his own cult. See for instance for the employment of the figures of Ivan the Terrible and Peter the Great as a component of Stalin's cult, Maureen Perrie, *The Cult of Ivan the Terrible in Stalin's Russia* (New York: Palgrave, 2001).

⁶⁴ Katherine Verdery, 'The 'Etatization' of Time...', 54.

viewer(s)/beneficiary(ies) of the commemoration suggested a seizure of that particular moment (PLATE 4).

All these techniques of controlling time and historical memory were instrumented, as we have already mentioned, at the very top. They were initially employed as a means of validating the regime, but they gradually evolved towards being used as part of Ceaușescu's personality cult. Ceaușescu viewed himself as the leader of a glorious nation and the continuer of the most illustrious figures of the national history. As a result of this inflexible conception, he constructed his image in close association with those of his most eminent predecessors. His strong sense of history and his own perception as the one chosen to fulfil fully the Romanians' secular aspirations are proven by testimonies of his collaborators. All of them converge in this respect and point to the particular image and role Ceaușescu ascribed to himself as well as to the effort he took to chisel them accordingly. For instance, Cornel Burtică, Central Committee's Secretary on propaganda issues, recalls:

It should be observed the tenacity with which Ceaușescu created the premises and acted for a long time to become the absolute leader of Romania, because he believed that he was the successor of our great forerunners – Decebal, Ștefan cel Mare, Mircea cel Bătrîn, Mihai Viteazul, Alexandru Ioan Cuza – and that he was carrying the greatness of Romania on new peaks.⁶⁵

Furthermore, testimonies express the idea that Ceaușescu was personally involved in shaping his future image. He paid close attention to various details and focused on the different ways that would preserve his image precisely in the way he wanted. The same Cornel Burtică remembers:

Ceaușescu had a sense of history as I rarely could see. He was truly preoccupied with his image, especially with his future image, how much he would be appreciated after his death. He corrected and reviewed all the

⁶⁵ Rodica Chelaru, *Culpe care nu se uită*, Convorbiri cu Cornel Burtică (București: Curtea Veche, 2001), 79.

Political Council's protocols, the Permanent Bureau's, Secretariat's, etc, the main minutes and especially the parts that encompassed his conclusions or various directives.

This sense of history manifested as well with respect to his big constructions – the Civic Centre, the House of the People, and other edifices of national importance. He provided documents on every occasion to testify who the founder was. Documents were buried in the edifices' foundations or preserved into archives.⁶⁶

Apart from his personal perception in a historical perspective, the way in which his acts or achievements were described contributed to the 'historicisation' of his persona. This resembles very much the manner in which Stalin's achievements were reported, a manner that fitted into a more general tendency of equating every single Soviet success with a historic fact.⁶⁷ For instance, the way in which Ceaușescu's various re-elections were described in the journals of the time followed the same pattern and tried to underline precisely this dimension of his constructed image: his indisputable place in the national history. Adrian Păunescu, probably the emblematic court poet, who was the director and the presenter of the national festival 'Song to Romania' depicts in *Scînteia* the election of Ceaușescu as the President of the Front of Democracy and Socialist Unity:

Moment of national history! Moment that seems taken from the gallery of glorious times of our motherland. What is normal, what is natural, what is as it should be is happening now at the Palace's Hall, The Socialist Republic of Romania: The Hero of the People, the general secretary of the Party, the President of Romania, the visionary and tireless, lucid and inspired author of the socialist Democracy and of our national Unity, Comrade Nicolae Ceaușescu, is elected, through the unanimous vote of those present there,

⁶⁶ Ibid, 199.

⁶⁷ For instance, record-breaking flights were 'historic', the Stalin Constitution was a 'historic fact', etc. See for this Jeffrey Brooks, *Thank you, Comrade Stalin! Soviet Public Culture from Revolution to Cold War* (Princeton University Press, 2000), 79.

through ovations, applause and acclamations, President of the Front of Democracy and Socialist Unity.⁶⁸

To conclude this section, Ceaușescu developed his public image in a strong historical perspective that aimed at appropriating past historical figures and mastering time. Various devices – conceived at the very top and then amplified and refined by propagandists and sycophants – were put to work in order to shape the president's image according to the desired pattern. Ceaușescu himself was highly interested in cultivating those forms of the cult that reinforced the idea that he was the continuer of an illustrious lineage of national heroes. Moreover, he focused on those forms of the cult that allowed an easier manipulation of historical time. The nation was conceived as a continuous unit, from the ancient times to the modern ones, and as a unitary community of Romanians led by glorious leaders. As we will see in the following sections the cult forms cultivated by Ceaușescu and by the State propaganda were precisely those that could reinforce the aforementioned ideas.

1.2.3. Stadium celebrations of historical moments and figures

One of the most distinct hallmarks of the communist regimes was the constant, repetitive and lavish commemoration of past historical figures and events. As part of an all-encompassing process of gradual ritualisation of life, these commemorations were designed in order to form approving attitudes towards the Party policy, to induce sentiments of cohesion and solidarity among the led, ultimately to buttress and legitimise those in power.⁶⁹ The Ceaușescu leadership was not an exception in this direction. On the contrary, it engaged in a scrupulously designed plan of evoking, remembering and commemorating various historical figures and events. The commemorations could take different forms, from those involving limited

⁶⁸ *Scînteia*, January 19, 1980.

⁶⁹ For the issue of ritualization of life in the Soviet Union see Christel Lane, *The Rites of Rulers, Ritual in industrial society – the Soviet Case* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1981); Rosalinde Sartori, 'Stalinism and Carnival: Organisation and Aesthetics of Political Holidays', in Hans Günther (ed.), *Culture of the Stalin Period* (New York, St. Martins Press in association with the School of Slavonic and East European Studies, 1990).

numbers of people (such as exhibitions or academic sessions) to those comprising a large participation (such as parades, meetings or stadium performances whose impact was further reinforced by live broadcasting). From all these commemorative devices, the following section will focus on the investigation of stadium celebrations.

Ceaușescu's penchant for lavishly orchestrated stadium performances manifested itself from the beginning of his rule. Those stadium performances involved a huge number of individuals, professionals and amateurs jointly, who were trained for such events sometimes months in advance. The performances not only relied on the human body (the use of the plural would be a more adequate description of the situation as the goal of those performances was to render the idea of the nation's body, the leader being the supreme viewer of this metamorphosis) but also on the employment of light, music and loudly spoken out patriotic commentaries. All these characteristics of the performances staged during the Ceaușescu's rule made them resemble those devised in the Third Reich.⁷⁰ As in Germany, the declared purpose of those performances was the celebration of the nation as community and of its common past.⁷¹ However, whilst the discourse within these celebrations was focused on Romanian past, seen as a long series of fights for independence and national dignity, the focal point of the Nazi meetings was the future, the one thousand year Reich that was supposed to come into being. Nevertheless, both types of performances ended up without failure as a means of worshiping the leader. Ceaușescu was praised as the last in a long series of great leaders, the one who

⁷⁰ Eugen Barbu, writer, staunch devotee of the regime and of Ceaușescu personally, guru of an entire generation of court poets and protochronists, compared the stadium celebrations with the Greek exercises performed on stadiums: 'He [Nicolae Ceaușescu] had also the Greek idea of taking out children and adults on stadiums for perfecting their bodies.', Eugen Barbu, 'Arhitect al Păcii', in *Omagiu*, Uniunea Scriitorilor din România (Bucharest: Cartea Românească, 1983), 48. The allusion to the Nazi rhetoric is thinly veiled.

⁷¹ In the Nazi rhetoric the word 'community' was employed. It was mainly used in relation to architecture and urban planning and it referred to the construction of places in which the 'community' could have been best expressed: 'Moreover, most of the writing on architecture in the thirties had some popular appeal insofar as it reflected nationalism. In this regard, the idea of "community" (*Gemeinschaft*), to be expressed in vast meeting places and in *Thing* theatres (outdoor amphitheatres) is an important part of the contemporary attitude.', Robert Taylor, *The Word in Stone The Role of Architecture in the National Socialist Ideology* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1974), 10.

managed to accomplish the historical goals of the Romanian nation (independence and national dignity), Hitler as the providential leader, the first who succeeded in restoring the national dignity of the German people after such a long time.

What follows is an extract from the description of one of the first such stadium performances, a performance that took place as early as 1968. The occasion was the celebration of 120 years since the 1848 Revolution:

The Stadium of the Republic, bedecked for the festivity, was Saturday night the witness of an impressive mass gathering devoted to the anniversary of 120 years since the Revolution of 1848. [...] On the grand stadium, transformed into an immense scene the rich history of our people began to unfold. [...] Time changes into sound and light, in colours and songs. The great historical evocation begins [...] The participants to the mass meeting live with an intense emotion the moments evoked. Under their eyes pass Mircea cel Bătrîn, Ștefan cel Mare, Ioan de Hunedoara, Mihai Viteazul⁷², accompanied by their flag-bearers, soldiers, with whom they went into battle at Nicopole and Podul Înalt, Vaslui and Călugăreni. The successors of those who had defended with their bare chests the ancient Romanian land are those who fought for its full development and independence in the tempestuous year 1848, the fight of the '48ers is the natural result of the ancients' fight – it seems to say the scene that we can see under our very eyes [...] In the stands the inscription '1848' appears. 'Europe is on fire' the announcer's voice says ...⁷³

The historical evocation continued with the depiction of five more important events: the 1859 Union of the two Romanian Principalities of Moldavia and Walachia, the

⁷² The selection of historical figures is also very telling because the four singled out *voievozi* represented Walachia (Mircea cel Bătrîn), Moldavia (Ștefan cel Mare), Transylvania (Ioan de Hunedoara), and the united, independent Romania (Mihai Viteazul was the one who unified for a short period the Romanian Principalities in 1600). Also significant was the attempt to recuperate Ioan de Hunedoara (Hunyadi János – Hungarian nobleman of Romanian origin who became prince of Transylvania in 1441), a figure who became a matter of dispute between the Hungarian and Romanian historiographies.

⁷³ George Radu Chirovici, 'Emoționantă retrospectivă istorică', *Scînteia*, June 30, 1968, 2.

1877 War of Independence, the 1918 Union of the Kingdom of Romania with Transylvania, the formation of the Romanian Communist Party in 1921, and 'the liberation of the country from the fascist occupation' in 1944. The entire celebration ended with the glorious intonation of the song 'Motherland-Party' devoted to the contemporary Romania. In fact, the course of this celebration was rather circular than linear for it opened with the speech of Ceaușescu, in an attempt to establish the right perspective from which the show should be followed⁷⁴ and closed with the praising of the contemporary period and of the Party.

A distinct direction followed in the State-organised celebrations was the commemoration of the 'first centralised and unitary Dacian State'. This was probably the best known example of applying the protochronist doctrine to the field of history. It aimed at underlining the importance of the Thracian element in the formation of the Romanian people, at emphasising 'the anteriority of the autochthonous civilization compared with other ancient civilizations'.⁷⁵ The political role of thracomania was that of diminishing the effect that external influences, including the Roman one, might have had upon the Romanian civilisation and, at a more general level, of strengthening the idea of independence and self-supported society. As mentioned in this chapter, the historical truth was heavily deformed in an attempt to trace similarities between the unity and sovereignty of the Dacian State under Burebista and the Ceaușescu political system and to underline the two thousand year continuity of the Romanian people on the same territory.⁷⁶ References to Dacians were pretty frequent from the beginning of

⁷⁴ 'Socialism – Comrade Nicolae Ceaușescu said – has realised for the first time in the history of Romania the materialisation of our people's ideals of national independence and sovereignty, for which numberless generations of forerunners have been fighting. Today the destiny of our country is decided by our free people itself, equal with all the peoples of the world, willing and able to achieve a dignified place within the great family of the international civilisation.', George Radu Chirovici, *art.cit.*, 2.

⁷⁵ Șerban Papacostea, 'Captive Clio: Romanian Historiography under Communist Rule', *European History Quarterly*, Vol. 20, No. 2, April 1996, 197.

⁷⁶ For instance, in the movie called 'The Dacians', the number one hit of the 1967 season in Romania, the king Decebal (the one who fought against the Roman invaders in 101-102 AC and 105-106 AC and heroically died on the battlefield) tells to a Roman envoy: 'We Dacians are hospitable and willing to share everything with our guests. We would rather die, however, than lose our

the regime, but the Dacian State and its leaders became a recurrent theme during the eighties. The eighties were a time when the regime retreated into a fictional, propagandistically constructed space, where the manufactured glorious past functioned both as an ideological reminder of the endurance of the Romanian people and as a counter-part to a deteriorating reality.

Two celebrations stood out within this direction. The first moment was the 2050 year celebration of the foundation of the Dacian state in 1980. It was probably one of the most spectacular celebrations of the Ceaușescu regime which encompassed many collateral events.⁷⁷ The moment was prepared well in advance and received substantial supervision from the very top. The stadium celebration followed the already established scenario, engaging tens of thousands of people who re-enacted crucial moments of Romanian history, from the ancient time to that of Ceaușescu.⁷⁸ Whilst the general tendency was that of establishing links and identifying similarities between the ancient times and the Ceaușescu Era, the praise of the modern epoch then was more open than ever. Moreover, the celebration aimed at underlining the fact that the secular aspirations of unity and independence of the Romanian people (firstly achieved under Burebista's rule) were fully fulfilled in the Ceaușescu Era.

In spite of denying any substantial foreign intervention in the formation and development of the Romanian people, the celebration of the autochthonous Dacian ancestors resembles, to a certain extent, the trend called *romanità*, initiated during Mussolini's Fascist regime in Italy. As in communist Romania, the Fascist regime of Mussolini tried to establish a direct link with the Roman imperial past, seen as part of the national history of Italy and as an inspiration for the fascist imperialism

independence and freedom.', Paul Lendvai, *Eagles in Cobwebs, Nationalism and Communism in the Balkans* (London: Macdonald and Company Publishers Ltd, 1970), 262-263.

⁷⁷ For instance, Romanian historians, who were participating in the International Congress of Historical Sciences held in Bucharest that year, were forced to approach the theme of the first Dacian state. Most of the papers were focused on the idea of similarity and continuity between the Dacian state and Ceaușescu's Romania. See Alexandru Zub, *Orizont inchis, Istoriografia română sub comunism* (Iași: Institutul European, 2000), 82.

⁷⁸ See for the description of the stadium celebration *Scînteia*, July 6, 1980.

and *missione civilizzatrice* that, according to Mussolini, Italy was called to play.⁷⁹ A process of 'deification of the nation'⁸⁰ took place which accented the community of citizens educated in the spirit of *virtus romana*, who would focus more on the common interests of the nation than on their individual liberties. In order to nurture the *virtus romana* among its citizens, the fascist state developed a mythology of the Roman leaders (Romulus, Scipio Africanus, Caesar, Augustus, etc) who best embodied the virtues that were supposed to be an example for the Italian people: 'valour, justice, law, order, dedication to collective interests, and high moral standards.'⁸¹ This resembles the similar process that took place in communist Romania where both activists and historians strove to identify a Dacian dynasty and to depict Dacians as courageous, honest, hard working, inventive, and, above all, in love with freedom and ready to die for it. But probably the most striking similarity between the two past oriented movements was the employment of ancient leaders in the construction of the contemporary leader cults. Similarly to the employment of Burebista by the Ceaușescu regime, Mussolini used the image of Augustus to reinforce the idea of the *romanità* and to portray himself as the continuer of the illustrious *princeps et pater patriae*. The cult of Augustus and that of the *romanità* culminated in 1937-38 in the celebration of the *bimillenario augusteo*, the commemoration of the 2000th birthday of the Roman emperor.⁸² The celebration of Augustus encompassed the publishing of articles and pamphlets, public commemorations and solemn ceremonies in academies and universities, the organisation of an 'enormous exhibition of archaeological replicas and scale models of Roman monuments, presented as "evidence" of Rome's greatness and the eternal values of its civilisation.'⁸³

The second important moment in this tendency of re-interpreting the past for the benefit of the present was the 1986 celebration of the fights between the Dacians

⁷⁹ Romke Visser, 'Fascist Doctrine and the Cult of the Romanità', *Journal of Contemporary History*, Vol. 27, No. 1 (January 1992), 15.

⁸⁰ Emilio Gentile, 'Fascism as Political Religion', *Journal of Contemporary History*, Vol. 25, No. 2/3 (May 1990), 230.

⁸¹ Romke Visser, *op. cit.*, 13.

⁸² *Ibid.*, 15.

⁸³ *Ibid.*, 16.

and the Persians led by Darius. This celebration can be interpreted from two angles. First of all, it speaks for the desire of the Romanian State to associate its past with that of 'the most ancient nation in the world'. Although the confrontation between Dacians and Persians was not a success for the former (Dacians were defeated by the Persians led by Darius in 514 BC), the temptation of portraying the Dacians as adversaries of the great Persians and, through this, of pushing their attestation even more further back into history (as compare with the year 44BC when Burebista established his Dacian state) was probably too big as to skip over 'details'. Secondly, this celebration might offer us a clue with respect to the source of inspiration of Ceaușescu's massive reorientation to and lavish celebration of the remotest past. We argue here that Ceaușescu's model for his orientation towards the ancient history might have been the similar movement that took place at the beginning of the 1970s in Iran. It is well known that Ceaușescu cultivated close relationships with states of Africa and Asia especially from the late seventies, early eighties on. These relationships manifested preponderantly in the economic field,⁸⁴ but it is very much possible that other aspects may also have caught his attention. During his frequent visits in the region, he might have become aware of the Iranian dynasty's state policy towards the antiquity and tried to emulate it. Both movements are State supported ones, based on little, if any, archaeological evidence and initiated in order to serve the regimes.⁸⁵ The similarity between the figures chosen to be celebrated (2050 years in the Romanian case, 2500 in the Iranian one) also points to a connection between the two projects. There is also likeness at the rhetorical level, in the way both moments/celebrations were employed in order to emphasise the parallelism between the ancient rulers and the present ones. For instance, in a volume devoted to the 2500th anniversary of the foundation of the Iranian Empire, Cyrus the Great was described in terms more suitable to depict the activity and

⁸⁴ R. H. Linden, 'Romania Foreign Policy in the 1980s: Domestic-Foreign Policy Linkages', in S. L. Wolchik & M. S. Sodaro (eds.), *Foreign and Domestic Policy in Eastern Europe* (London: Macmillan, 1983) and Robert King, 'Romania and the Third World', *Orbis*, No. 4, 1978.

⁸⁵ Paul Connerton, *How Societies Remember* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1989), 52 and Bernard Lewis, *History: Remembered, Recovered, Invented* (New Jersey: Princeton University Press, 1975), 41.

merits of a modern leader.⁸⁶ Furthermore, similarly to the Romanian case, the connection and continuity between the two distant Iranian epochs were strongly underlined in the aforementioned volume.⁸⁷

The importance of mass celebrations in the cult of Ceaușescu is obvious by now. The pumping of both human and material resources into this type of celebrations transformed them into a constant presence in the Romanians' lives. Moreover, the permanent reinforcement of Ceaușescu's image through mass celebrations became gradually the most common form of maintaining his cult. Was it also the most gratifying for Ceaușescu? The one he preferred and deliberately cultivated? Memoirs published after 1989 by people who were close to him during his leadership seem to converge on this idea. They not only prove his proclivity for mass demonstrations, but also his part in the initiation and augmentation of this type of collective praising. Dumitru Popescu, one of the closest collaborators of Ceaușescu⁸⁸, recalls when he first noticed an obvious interest on behalf of Ceaușescu for the collective forms of praising:

It did not seem to me until then that he had manifested a special interest in praise, I had not seen him going for lauds or stimulating them. On that particular occasion, during the congress [the Xth Congress, held in 1969], he suggested something that would lead to the intensification of the lauds addressed to him. Thus he initiated, he conceived those actions. For instance, he requested that a youth delegation come forward at the tribune to express their adherence, then another one representing the military forces and, in the last minute, when the congress was about to close, he solicited the loyalty

⁸⁶ Zaven N. Davidian, *Iran in the Service of World Peace, On the Occasion of the 2500th Anniversary Celebration of the Founding of the Iranian Empire* (Tehran: Inaco LTD, 1971), 2.

⁸⁷ 'It can, therefore, be seen that the seeds of the present era of socio-economic reforms which have been initiated in Iran by the Shahanshah, were sown twenty-five centuries ago [...] The same holds true for the foundations of the foreign policy of Iran. It was Emperor Cyrus the Great, who issued the Charter of Freedom of Nations. Thus Iran beginning from those days started to assume a fundamental role in furthering better relations with other nations', Ibid, 3.

⁸⁸ Dumitru Popescu, a writer, was successively Director of the Propaganda Section within the Central Committee, Director of *Scinteia*, the Romanian Communist Party's newspaper and President of the political Academy 'Ștefan Gheorghiu'. He was also for a while part of the team in charge of the editing of the presidential speeches.

declaration of the representatives of the communist movement's veterans. [...] Of course, Ceaușescu did not say: 'They should come here and praise me.' He claimed total adherence to the political line of the party, but this line was uttered by him, therefore his person was identified with the party; when one looked for the author of a thesis or of a position one did not find the party, but him. Over time this substitution became total and, unfortunately, not only as far as principles were concerned, but also facts.⁸⁹

This incipient interest was further developed. In the eighties, it seems that his interest in other forms of the cult than mass praising was indeed minimal:

For Ceaușescu this [the praise of individuals] was totally unsatisfying and dull, as it was infinitely less in comparison with what he wanted. A few disparate voices uttering laudatory words were nothing. He had already surpassed this phase. He looked through journals, he saw his name, read the flattering phrases; they did not touch him. For him essential was the mass delirium, the praise of the millions, the adherence of hyper-excited collectives, the clamour of the public meetings, the great bunches of workers with their hands stretched out trembling to touch him, the amassed lines of people spread out on kilometres, the slogans shouted by hundreds of thousands of chests. He built up the complicated framework of the collective delirium as a lucid and meticulous architect.⁹⁰

The public commemorations of major historical events were always followed by festive gatherings of high Party members. These gatherings were gradually transformed into supplementary occasions for praising Ceaușescu. This highlights the progressive transformation of Ceaușescu's entourage into a servile grouping of yes-men who contributed through their obedient attitude to the alteration of his cult in a perfect masquerade. The same Dumitru Popescu remembers such an occasion,

⁸⁹ Dumitru Popescu, *Am fost și cioplitor de himere*, Convorbire realizată de Ioan Tecșa (București: Ed. Expres, 1994), 158.

⁹⁰ Dumitru Popescu, *op. cit.*, 234.

which highlights this process of sliding from the anniversary of a historical event to the praise of Ceaușescu himself:

Through the door, an announcing wind came into the room and everybody's eyes turned into the same direction as a rain of tamed arrows or a circle of swords' peaks drawn together in salute. Preceded by two protocol officers, the presidential couple appeared in the frame of the door which was twice higher than a human being. Following them there were few officials who had done the honours of the house at the beginning. When the national anthem began, the small cortege stopped and the long lines of guests froze upright. [...] The procession went along the main table and each of us raised his/her glass [...] clinked with both of them and wished them [...] the same absurd 'Many Happy Returns of the Day' as if the commemoration of the end of the WW II was transformed into the State leader's anniversary.⁹¹

1.2.4. Architecture as a Medium of Immortalisation

Ceaușescu was fully preoccupied with his legacy, with the way people would remember him and his epoch.⁹² He tried to single out *his* epoch as the perfect stage reached by the Romanian civilisation and in this respect one of the most evident characteristics of his cult was the delimitation-in-continuity. It was not only that propaganda constructed Ceaușescu's image drawing massively on Romanian past and in a strict relationship to past historical figures, but, from a certain point on, it started to individualise 'the Ceaușescu Era' as the most advanced, fulfilled and enlightened period in the history of Romania. The regime's propaganda unceasingly stressed the economic achievements, the unprecedented agricultural production or the lucrative industrialisation of the country, the free educational system, the care for family, children and so on.

⁹¹ Dumitru Popescu, *Elefanții de porțelan, Scene și personaje în umbra Cortinei de Fier, Memorii Transfigurate* (București: MATCH București, n.y.), 370.

⁹² His Cabinet's secretary, Silviu Curticeanu, confirms this view in his memoirs: 'I do not think that anyone in his entourage really loved him. He was not even interested in this aspect! He was in love with his heroic figure in historical perspective that he alone constructed.' Silviu Curticeanu, *op. cit.*, 96.

Apart from this constant verbal and written propaganda he was keen to discover a medium that would fulfil better his desire of transcending time. He wanted to find something durable, something that could have certified over ages that he was indeed the ruler of a glorious epoch. Therefore, he chose architecture as the vehicle of his eternisation. To a certain degree, a direct model of Ceaușescu's chosen means could be identified in the prototype of the mediaeval Orthodox ruler who founded churches as a sign of a similar quest for eternity. But while the mediaeval *voievod* built up his church on theological grounds, out of devotional spirit and as a token of his total obedience before a non-worldly authority, Ceaușescu centrally positioned himself within the project, employing the architecture without only as a medium to carry on his name over the ages. Furthermore, the mediaeval *voievod* always constructed the church paying attention to tradition, to the architectural patterns around; when he innovated, he did it within certain limits, maintaining the basic typology of the monument. What has been produced in Romania in the 1980s was not only completely alien and inadequate in terms of structure, form and decoration, but also incompatible and out of size when compared to the other structures around. Therefore, Ceaușescu's undertaking seems to resemble more those building initiatives conceived under the sign of exceptional, such as those belonging, in the ancient times, to Augustus, or, in more recent ones, to Hitler or Stalin. Furthermore, Ceaușescu's conception regarding the role of architecture and urban planning reminds more of that of Hitler than Stalin's⁹³ as Ceaușescu aimed at initially conquering a space (by demolishing the historical centre of Bucharest), appropriating it (by building on the ruins of the old town) and reinvesting it with a new symbolic meaning (the centre of the new power) that would ultimately permeate the space and immortalise his name.

⁹³ For Hitler's conception on the role of architecture as a visibly everlasting embodiment of the National-Socialist doctrine see Jochen Thies, 'Nazi Architecture – A Blueprint for World Domination: The Last Aims of Adolf Hitler', in David Welch (ed.) *Nazi Propaganda, The Power and the Limitations* (New Jersey: Barnes & Noble Books, 1983). For the importance of monumental architecture in the Soviet Union see Anatole Kopp, 'Le gigantisme architectural en Union soviétique', *Communications*, 42, 1985 and Vladimir Paperny. *Architecture in the Age of Stalin, Culture Two* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2002).

The rebuilding of the historical centre of Bucharest was only the most idiosyncratic architectural initiative of Ceaușescu. It was part of a larger plan for transforming and remodelling the country that also encompassed the opening of big industrial sites, factories, channels, etc, and which ultimately aimed at the transformation of nature, at its taming or beautifying, at proving the unlimited force and resources of the new communist man in conquering the space around him. Ceaușescu's frantic plan of industrialisation of the country, his project of 'systematisation of the Romanian villages',⁹⁴ or his ambitious plan to construct a channel connecting the Danube with the Black Sea are only a few of the big projects which aimed at transforming Romania into the multilaterally developed socialist society. Following an idea firstly developed in the iconoclastic years of the Russian avant-garde⁹⁵ and then fully embraced by the Soviet regime,⁹⁶ the new communist man was supposed to attempt to 'organise' nature, to 'order' it according to his own rules and needs, to build up the new communist society at any cost. Ceaușescu's large-scale plan of transforming the country fell into this line of conceiving the role of the new communist man and, more importantly, it allowed him to play the main part within it, to underline his own contribution to the transformation of Romania into a new society.

However, all these initiatives lost their attractiveness with the emergence of the most far-reaching and dearest project of the 1980s: the reconstruction of the centre

⁹⁴ See for this issue D. C. Giurescu, *The Razing of the Romania's Past* (New York: US/COMOS, 1989) and Chantal Delterre-De Bruycker, 'Les démolis de Snagov, L'Est: les mythes et les restes', *Communications*, 55, 1992.

⁹⁵ 'Beautiful is everything that bears the sign of the organizing human hand; splendid is every product of human manufacture directed toward the goal of conquering and mastering the elemental forces and inert matter.', Sergei Tretiakov cited in Irina Gutkin, *The Cultural Origins of the Socialist Realist Aesthetic, 1890-1934* (Evanston, Illinois: Northwestern University Press, 1999), 47.

⁹⁶ 'The notion that the natural world was a hostile entity, which human society must struggle to "tame" and perfect, was axiomatic, corresponding as it did not only to the modernist and technophilic inclinations of Marxism but to an important element of more traditional Russian attitudes as well. The result was a pervasive mood of Prometheanism that infused the post-revolutionary period down to the end of the 1920s, a faith in the boundless power to re-create the world that some day would be Soviet Russia's.', Mark Bassin, 'I object to rain that is cheerless': landscape art and the Stalinist aesthetic imagination', *Ecumene*, July 2000, Vol. 7, No. 3, 315.

of Bucharest. The complex project called the Civic Centre⁹⁷ comprised the House of the Republic,⁹⁸ most of the ministers arranged in a sort of semi-circle in front of the House and next to it the House for Science and Technology, the fief of Elena Ceaușescu, an architectural representation of the two-headed political power in Romania.⁹⁹ From this centre of power, a big boulevard was cut, called The Victory of Socialism, bordered by expensive blocks of apartments for the political hierarchy. Apart from this, the project included the National Library¹⁰⁰ and the impressive National Centre for Socialist Creation and Culture 'Song to Romania'¹⁰¹ (never erected), that was supposed to accommodate the National Opera, plus many halls for theatre performances, concerts, ballet, cinema and exhibitions.

That the project was conceived as long-lasting is very clear from the following aspects. First of all, this architectural project distinguished through its amplitude. The word 'amplitude' could be understood here in at least three senses. The project involved an ample process of 'cleaning', 'appropriating' a space that had had a distinct identity in the collective memory of the capital. The construction of a Boulevard of the Victory of Socialism precisely in the heart of the old centre of Bucharest aimed at underlining the triumph of the communist order over the old one. In this sense, Ceaușescu's choice of location for his architectural project respects the classical scheme of 'deconstructing and constructing' on the same spot, both actions being seen as equally valid affirmations of power and of quest for eternity.¹⁰² Furthermore, the amplitude of the project is proved by its enormous

⁹⁷ The architect Augustin Ioan affirms that many foreign architects who saw the pile claimed that what happened in Bucharest in the 1980s was 'the amplest such intervention in Europe', Augustin Ioan, *Power, Play and National Identity, Politics of Modernization in Central and East-European Architecture. The Romanian File* (Bucharest: The Romanian Cultural Foundation Publishing House, 1999), 159.

⁹⁸ The House of the Republic was supposed to accommodate three institutions: the Romanian Communist Party Headquarters, the Government and the State Council.

⁹⁹ 'Tovarășul Nicolae Ceaușescu a inaugurat ieri lucrările de construcție', *România liberă*, June 26, 1984, 3.

¹⁰⁰ 'Vizită de lucru a tovarășului Nicolae Ceaușescu în capitală', *Scînteia*, August 18, 1989, 1-3.

¹⁰¹ 'Tovarășul Nicolae Ceaușescu a inaugurat lucrările de construcție a centrului național de creație și cultură socialistă 'Cîntarea României'', *Scînteia*, July 6, 1989, 1-3.

¹⁰² See for this idea Mikhail Yampolsky, 'In the Shadow of Monuments, Notes on Iconoclasm and Time', in: Nancy Condee (ed.): *Soviet Hieroglyphics, Visual Culture in Late Twentieth-Century Russia* (Bloomington and Indianapolis: Indiana University Press, 1995), 100.

dimensions. The House of the Republic was gradually enlarged as a result of Ceaușescu's own directives until it became the second largest building in the world (after Pentagon). The Boulevard of the Victory of Socialism was a few centimetres broader than the world famous Champs-Élysées. In addition to this challenging of well-known architectural and urban landmarks, the project was totally incongruous with the architecture around. It aimed at singling out the power that it represented as something distinct, remarkable, great. On the other hand, the pure weight of the buildings was meant to paralyse time. Their colossal dimensions and stability were incompatible with the momentary human existence. The vast square in front of the House, where people were supposed to amass and to listen to Ceaușescu's speeches, was only one architectural device that would make each single individual feel his/her own temporal limit in comparison with the eternity of the construction he/she faced. Finally, the word 'amplitude' can be understood in the sense of the human resources involved in the process of erecting the Civic Centre. The enormous number of workers, constructors, artists, etc, who contributed their effort and knowledge to the building of the Civic Centre speaks about the vanity and the sense of power of the Romanian leader. His penchant for huge mass celebrations, with people acclaiming in unison, as well as his fascination with architecture that both dwarfed the individual and was the result of collective effort account for the same type of relationship between the leader and the led. It accounts for a very primitive yet satisfying mechanism of making his power visible.¹⁰³ With respect to the construction of the Civic Centre we think that the relationship of power can be read in the following way: the effort of many for the immortalisation of one – the leader; the mortal, anonymous masses working to a project with which the leader totally associated and which was meant to preserve his memory over ages.

Apart from the concrete architectural elements that can be seen and interpreted in relationship to the issue of time, the rhetoric employed by the Ceaușescu regime to

¹⁰³ Only a small detail to prove this: he did not accept the columns to be carved mechanically – all work on them should be done manually, in spite of country's glorious industrialisation, which proves that despots indulge equally in seeing people working for them, no matter if they lived in the XXth century or in Ancient Egypt., Silviu Curticeanu, *Mărturia unei istorii trăite, Imagini suprapuse* (București: Albatros, 2000), 323.

describe the project aimed at the same temporal transgression. The inauguration of the construction, in June 1984, was a carefully orchestrated event. The entire scenario was initiated by Ceaușescu who paid minute attention to every single detail: designed the ceremony, edited the text that was buried in the foundation of the House of the Republic, even allotted to his collaborators the task of finding an enduring material for the cylinder that contained the scroll¹⁰⁴ (PLATE 5). The ceremony was broadcast and widely advertised in the newspapers. The buried text read:

Today, I have inaugurated the task of building the House of the Republic and the Boulevard of the Victory of Socialism, the grandiose and luminous foundations of this epoch of profound transformations and innovations, of monumental buildings which will persist across the ages.¹⁰⁵

The ceremonial performed at the beginning of each new construction within the Civic Centre complex followed the same scheme. Only scrolls became longer and texts more sophisticated:

In the 19th day of August 1988, in the 2060th year since the foundation of the first centralised and independent Dacian state, the 44th year since the victory of the Romanian people's revolution of social and national liberation, and the 23rd year since the Ninth Congress of the Romanian Communist Party, we have inaugurated the construction works on the Centre of National Councils of Revolutionary Worker Democracy, a new and monumental edifice rounding off the great foundations of this epoch of strong economic, social and cultural blossoming of our socialist homeland.¹⁰⁶

His obsession with history and with transcending time is obvious from the two examples cited above. The cadence of the second text, similar to that of a chronicle, makes it even more obvious. Furthermore, towards the end of the regime it seems

¹⁰⁴ Silviu Curticeanu, *op. cit.*, 319-321.

¹⁰⁵ *Scînteia*, June 26, 1984.

¹⁰⁶ *Scînteia*, August 20, 1988.

that only the 'essential' dates of the national history were preserved for posterity, Ceaușescu's epoch being the one who crowned the millenary evolution of the Romanian people.

Ceaușescu's desire to preserve his name through architectural constructions and his will to link his epoch with the ancient, founding times of the Romanian people resemble other leaders' initiatives of eternalising their names through the connection with past and glorious moments of the national history. Saddam Hussein's plan of rebuilding the legendary palaces of the town of Babylon on their original sites aims at underlining the millenary existence of the Iraqi people, its great civilisation and glorious history and at bonding Hussein's name with that of his famous predecessor Nebuchadnezzar. The device employed by Saddam Hussein in order to immortalise his name imitated the one used by the ancient king. Whereas the Babylonian king imprinted his seal on every third brick in his huge construction, Hussein felt the need to stamp his name on each single brick used in the reconstruction of Babylon.¹⁰⁷ Ceaușescu had a similar concern but materialised in a different way. He ordered that on each factory, on each representative edifice (cultural and administrative buildings, recreational facilities, etc) be inscribed the year when the construction started and that when it finished.¹⁰⁸

The process of construction of the House of the Republic was generously illustrated in painting. We will analyse in chapter 5 the different hypostases that this theme took towards the end of the eighties. Suffice to mention at this point a work by Dan Hatmanu that captures precisely this idea of perennial foundation¹⁰⁹ (PLATE 6). Elena and Nicolae Ceaușescu are depicted in front of the finished House of the Republic. They are represented in the foreground whilst their foundation looks more like a small scale model in the background. Although the syntax is not that usually employed in a votive portrait, the allusion to this type of representation is obvious.

¹⁰⁷ Mark Almond, *The rise and fall of Nicolae & Elena Ceaușescu* (London: Chapmans, 1992), 154-155.

¹⁰⁸ Silviu Curticeanu, *Mărturia unei istorii trăite* (București: Ed. Albatros, 2000), 334.

¹⁰⁹ Dan Hatmanu, *Casa Republicii* (The House of the Republic), 1989

Their silhouettes projected against the image of the House of the Republic as a sign of identification with their foundation, their serene and happy faces as well as their depiction in a standing position on a folk carpet are discreet elements that evoke the a-temporality of a votive portrait. Furthermore, the impression of a frozen framework is accentuated by the way in which Elena and Nicolae Ceaușescu are represented. Although the painting was realised in 1989, the two leaders are depicted here much younger than they really were, in an idealised manner. They look outside the painting directly into the viewer's eyes, proud of their foundation. The gesture of the pioneers, who offer them bouquets of flowers, is not finalised. The presidential couple does not seem eager to receive the flowers as if the offering should be perpetual. The same could be said about the people who acclaim them in the background. They seem only decorative as if the tranquillity, the a-temporality of the moment should not be disturbed in any way.

Ceaușescu's image was fostered along a very strong temporal component. By employing different schemes and devices it attempted to appropriate both the past and the future and to carve in this way a clearly delineated place for itself. The past was appropriated and mastered through the articulation of a meticulously designed calendar whose purpose was the commemoration of various past events and figures. These commemorations invariably ended up as celebrations of Ceaușescu, their messages being used for the development of different facets of his cult. The future was appropriated through the agency of architectural constructions that were meant to preserve Ceaușescu's name over ages. Their monumentality not only functioned as an indicator of the political power that generated them, but also as a device of freezing time and preserving the present into the future. Both schemes employed for the immortalisation of Ceaușescu's name were further reinforced by the rhetoric that accompanied them which had a deep influence on the other forms of his cult.

1.3. The Place of the Visual Image in the Cult of Ceaușescu

The place that visual images played in the cult of Ceaușescu is not easy to determine. Firstly because his public statements on art were rather general, conveyed in a highly propagandistic language. They repeated over and over again a restricted set of axioms, without palpable differences or contextualised interpretations. They seemed to be nothing more than a short index of principles (art for the masses, art as a tool in the formation of the new man, etc) in accordance with which communist art should be produced. Sometimes they aspired to pass as a more concrete assessment of the art creation in Romania, but as they were formulated in vague and ideologically tainted terms, they could hardly attain their intended purpose. Furthermore, his rudimentary Marxist-Leninist conception led him to conceiving art as a mere ideological weapon and to interpret it only from this narrow standpoint. Secondly, his tastes were very rudimentary and his genuine interest in art and capacity of aesthetic enjoyment indeed minimal.

The memoirs of Ceaușescu's former collaborators are an invaluable source for the Romanian leader's tastes and perception of art. They not only highlight his narrowly based conception on art but also his predilection for certain forms of art that he considered more adequate for conveying the messages art was supposed to transmit.

Within the traditional art forms his favourite medium was the film. Like Stalin,¹¹⁰ Ceaușescu was interested in movies and enjoyed watching them, especially movies with revolutionary content, but also foreign detective movies.¹¹¹ It is also known that he closely supervised the production of films that depicted past events or personalities of Romanian history.¹¹² On his initiative, a series of historical movies was initiated (Dacians, Mihai Viteazul, Mircea cel Bătrîn, Ștefan cel Mare, etc) that were a good illustration of the regime's strong nationalist stand and of Ceaușescu's conception of art, as talks between Ceaușescu and the directors always took place

¹¹⁰ Robert Tucker, *op. cit.*, 557.

¹¹¹ Silviu Curticeanu, *op. cit.*, 99. Here Ceaușescu resembles Stalin who was interested both in movies celebrating the Revolution or World War II (where he usually played the central part) and in cowboy films. See for this Robert Conquest, *Stalin, Breaker of Nations* (New York: Viking, 1991), 295 and 282. Simon Sebag Montefiore says Stalin liked also detective movies, in Simon Sebag Montefiore, *Stalin, The Court of the Red Tsar* (London: Weidenfeld & Nicolson, 2003), 457.

¹¹² *Ibid.*, 179.

before and during the production of these movies. During these talks, Ceaușescu stated his view on how certain historical events and personalities should be depicted and what ideological issues movies should address. The Romanian productions were also previewed and commented upon, within a larger entourage that usually encompassed high ranking members of the party. On these occasions, Ceaușescu manifested his approval or disapproval, rejected or gave free pass to a movie and asked for the improvement of certain scenes or the introduction of new ones. For instance, Corneliu Mănescu, Minister of Foreign Affairs, recalls a discussion he had with Ceaușescu after they had watched a movie called *Sunday at 6 o'clock*. The movie was a depiction of the left movement during the period of underground resistance and the discussion between Ceaușescu and Mănescu highlights the Romanian leader's conception of art. Whilst Mănescu found the movie more realistic or at least using less idealised, propaganda formulas, Ceaușescu dismissed it as not having adequately rendered the reality. Discussing further the issue, Mănescu was able to identify Ceaușescu's essential dissatisfaction with the movie. He reproved the movie because it had not illustrated correctly the Party documents. As Mănescu concluded the episode: 'I understood from our conversation that he wanted clichés; Party documents transposed with artistic means.'¹¹³

However his interest in other forms of art did not match his attention to movies. He was not particularly attracted by painting or sculpture. Why was that so? First of all, his artistic education was next to none. Due to this lack of any kind of exposure to art, his tastes were limited to the most elementary figurative, having deep difficulties in grasping any art forms that did not resemble photographically the reality. His personal secretary, Silviu Curticeanu, remembers:

His tastes in painting and sculpture restrained themselves exclusively to the sphere of figurative, a figurative that went up to the photographic copying of

¹¹³ *Convorbiri neterminate: Corneliu Mănescu în dialog cu Lavinia Betea* (Iași: Ed. Polirom, 2001), 213.

reality, any attempt of abstractisation being totally over his capacity of understanding.¹¹⁴

As to complete this affirmation, Dumitru Popescu, director of *Scînteia*, who accompanied Ceaușescu in his official visit in the USA in 1970, recounts the experience of visiting the Guggenheim Museum:

I accompanied him at the Guggenheim Museum, the great museum of modern art in New York, full of essential works of art. If he had had his way, we would have visited the museum for no more than a minute. He was attracted by nothing at all. He looked passively, bored, a little hostile to all those wonders hung on the walls.¹¹⁵

These testimonies are strong indicators not only of his personal artistic tastes but also of his total unresponsiveness to these particular media. His tastes alone cannot account therefore for his lack of deep concern with painting. After all he could have intervened more transparently in this domain as he did in the field of architecture where his tastes and knowledge were limited as well. His disdain with painting was rather due to ideological reasons than specific lack of understanding and enjoyment. First of all, he was simply incapable of enjoying static forms because he perceived them as not sufficiently appealing and influential. Painting, no matter how big the dimensions, could never compete with architecture in conveying the ideas of grandeur and uniqueness that he praised so much. Secondly, paintings could be watched only in enclosed spaces. No matter how many visitors an exhibition displaying his portraits had, it did not compare with the frenzy and impact that mass demonstrations could raise. Thirdly, there was probably a feeling that paintings were ultimately perishable or easy to destroy while his building in stone would persist through ages. Fourthly, painting did not imply 'directing' a large crowd, exerting his will upon large collectives of people. Whereas in the orchestration of

¹¹⁴ Ibid, 99.

¹¹⁵ Dumitru Popescu, *Am fost și cioplitor*, 214.

mass demonstrations¹¹⁶ and in the construction of the Civic Center Ceaușescu could play a central, 'creative' role, he considered probably unworthy focusing on giving directions to isolated individuals. Conducting large masses of people gave him a gratifying sense of power, unequaled by the satisfaction a portrait of him could offer.

Both media of cult furthering preferred by Ceaușescu – mass demonstrations/stadium shows and architectural construction – had in common a power relationship. Both of them implied a crowd/mass of people performing/working towards and for the satisfaction of the leader. They highlighted unequivocally the relationship between individual and collectiveness, a relationship that in this case must be read in terms of power and possession. The issue was touched upon in various studies and with respect to different historical personalities who shaped their images as supreme leaders in close relationship to their led ones. Louis Marin produced probably the most seminal study in this sense. He explored the manner in which Louis XIV constructed his public image.¹¹⁷ Among others levels of investigation, Marin explored the shaping of the king's image according to the principle of property. He claimed that the display of power through the agency of the number of people who were working for the king was one of the most important ways of conceiving the power. Marin identified this *possession-power*, analysing the main hypostases where this relationship was obvious, namely the display of clothing (more labour involved in the realisation of those clothes, more subjects who worked for the king) and the king's processions (more numerous the king's court and attendants, more people who unconditionally served him).¹¹⁸ Richard Wortman analysed in depth the same relationship in the Russian imperial

¹¹⁶ 'Nothing was left randomly. Even the cult of personality was carefully orchestrated and not by his associates or sycophants, but precisely by the main conductor. Before any mass meeting, parade or procession, slogan-shouters were summoned at the Party headquarters and told which was the slogan of the day, and, of course, what historical merit of the leader should be emphasised on that occasion by being shouted in the microphones...', Silviu Brucan, *Generația irosită, Memorii* (București: Univers & Calistrat Hogaș, 1992), 151.

¹¹⁷ Louis Marin, *Portrait of the King* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1988).

¹¹⁸ 'To be elegant is not overly vain, for it shows that a great number of people work for one.... But it is not simply superficial, nor is it a simple harness, to have several arms [in one's service]. The more arms one has, the stronger one is.' [Pascal], *Ibid*, 26.

court ceremonies across time. He focused on the main moments when the display of power in such a way was manifest. Among them the most power-displaying were the processions which encompassed a huge number of persons, serving, adulating, ultimately reflecting the sovereign's position.¹¹⁹ The same type of relationship was identified with respect to the XXth century leaders. Hitler is again a case in point. His penchant for huge mass celebrations, with people acclaiming the leader at unison¹²⁰ as well as his fascination with architecture that both dwarfed the individual¹²¹ and was the result of collective effort account for the same type of relationship between the leader and the led.

To conclude, Ceaușescu's interest in his painted representations was not equaled by the attention he paid to collective forms of praising his name. His obsession with history and future memory led to a predilection for mass celebrations and architectural construction which would both facilitate the connection of his image with those of past historical figures and preserve his name over centuries. In other words, Ceaușescu preferred those forms of the cult which aimed at mastering the past and the future and helped him favourably position his own image in a historical perspective. Furthermore, these two forms of his cult offered him the opportunity to intervene, give advice and exert his power upon large crowds, to impose his will not only upon one person (the painter) but upon masses of 'workers' (architects, builders, engineers, dancers, pioneers, workers and so on). The sense of power that the intrusion in and control upon other people's lives, bodies, time, knowledge, expertise, and so on, gave him was far more satisfying than directing a painter or disseminating his image through a medium able to reach a limited number of persons. This is not to say that the cult of Ceaușescu was not amplified through the medium of painting as well. As we have seen in the examples analysed in this

¹¹⁹ See for instance the tsar's processions described in Richard S. Wortman, *Scenarios of Power, Myth and Ceremony in Russian Monarchy* (Princeton, New Jersey: Princeton University Press, 1995), 38.

¹²⁰ See Jan Kershaw, 'Working Towards the Führer', Reflections on the Nature of the Hitler Dictatorship', *Contemporary European History*, Vol. 2, July 1993.

¹²¹ 'The colossal dimensions of Roman and Nazi buildings also served to emphasise the insignificance of the individual engulfed in the architectural vastness of a state building.', Alex Scobie, *op. cit.*, 40.

chapter, paintings that dealt with the main aspects and ideas circulated by the official propaganda were produced in considerable numbers and they often tried to diversity and refine the message to be transmitted. The following chapters will try to clarify further the relationship between official propaganda, cultural policy and the field of art, the role of nationalist art discourse and of artists themselves in the development of the cult, as well as the role painting played in the promotion of Ceaușescu as the *leader* of Romania.

2. Cultural Policy in Romania: Nationalism, Marxist-Leninism, Mass Culture and their Influence on Art Production

'No oppression can be effective without
those who are prepared to submit to it.'
Andrei Amalrik

This chapter attempts to identify the main ideological, cultural and educational themes and practices promoted by the Ceaușescu regime in order to control and shape the field of cultural production. Whilst the recurrent tenets advanced during the Ceaușescu Epoch were those of the Marxist-Leninist doctrine, the cultural policy registered across time shifts in accent triggered both by changes in the general politics and the evolution of Ceaușescu's cult itself. The most interesting and decisive period for the scholar interested in the shaping of cultural policy during the Ceaușescu regime is probably the first decade of his rule when techniques of *captatio benevolentiae*, persuasion and coercion were developed and combined in order to consolidate his power and to construct his public image. From the middle of the seventies on and especially in the eighties little variation occurred; the cultural pattern established at the beginning of the seventies became the norm and the little counter-culture that emerged in the last years of the communist regime was not a result of direct confrontations or negotiations within the system, but of parallel, usually individual initiatives that appeared in cloistered, atomised niches. Ceaușescu's visual image emerged towards the end of the first decade of his rule and developed fully from the middle of the seventies on. In this respect, it was shaped according to and incorporated the ideological changes and accents that surfaced from the middle of the sixties to the beginning of the seventies. It had from the very beginning a complete form although variations and developments can be identified within each theme that became part of its visual cult.

It is therefore useful to analyse in detail this first decade of rapid changes and contradictory policies in which the cultural policy of the Ceaușescu regime developed and eventually cemented. The major lines of the cultural policy were drawn at the IXth Congress of the Romanian Communist Party (RCP) in 1965, the year of Ceaușescu's ascension to power. Whilst the Marxist-Leninist conception was the background of the entire Congress, its emblematic theme remained that of national sovereignty with the expected appendix: the return to the promotion of national culture. This policy was coupled with Ceaușescu's attempt to bring intellectuals to his side, especially those in the humanities who would better serve the newly regime's need to legitimise and contour its distinct profile.

In his endeavour to distance himself from the cultural practices of the previous regime, Ceaușescu openly courted the intellectuals in the immediate aftermath of his coming into power. He affirmed his determination to promote a different type of cultural policy within a highly staged tour of meetings with writers, artists, film directors that ended up with a firm alignment between the latter and the leader. The focus of those discussions was the freedom of creation, the diversity of styles and the exchange of ideas. Furthermore, these meetings were used as good occasions of reiterating the main thesis of the IXth Congress: the return to national culture. The response of artists and literati was enthusiastic as this initiative of Ceaușescu seemed to restore the intellectuals to their traditional place in Romanian culture, namely that of free producers of culture and, more importantly, that of opinion makers.¹ They were given the sensation that they were useful, that they practically were doing their job. Nationalism provided the ideal space of manoeuvre in this sense. As a highly politicised discourse, it allowed intellectuals who engaged in its reproduction, to come very close to the centre of power, practically to co-produce and co-shape this 'master narrative'. In addition, the co-opting of intellectuals as active part within the process, after two decades in which the nationalist discourse

¹ Dennis Deletant & Harry Hanak (eds.), *Historians as nation-builders: Central and South-East Europe* (Basingstoke: Macmillan, in association with SSEES, University of London, 1988; R. W. Seton-Watson, *The historian as a political force in Central Europe* (London: School of Slavonic studies in the University of London, 1922); Zygmunt Baumann, 'Intellectuals in East Central Europe', *East European Politics and Societies*, Vol. 1, No. 2, 1987.

had been totally ignored, recalled the salient role that intellectuals had played in the defining of the concept of 'nation' during the inter-war period.² That contributed to the perception of the newly established regime of Ceaușescu as the beginning of a period of normalisation in which humanists were due to perform a part they knew so well.

The cordial, apparently un-interfering relationship between the leader and intellectuals did not last very long. Already towards the end of the sixties signs of the leadership's discontent with the course taken by the liberalisation policy were given on different occasions. The unleashed energies of two-decade long oppressed intellectuals threatened to move the cultural liberalisation process beyond a controllable point. Therefore, in 1971 Ceaușescu himself curtailed the process by introducing a series of measures that froze the course taken by the cultural policy in the previous years. The measures, known as the July Theses, aimed practically at reversing the cultural policy towards a hard line socialist realism and re-imposing the party's control over cultural matters. The July Theses encompassed basically all directions that would have to become norms during the seventies and the eighties. What occurred after 1971 was practically only the putting into practice or, in other cases, just small variations of the principles enounced in the July Theses.

2.1. Nationalism, Marxism-Leninism, Westernisation, and the Shaping of Cultural Policy

The most common approach to the issue of nationalism during the Ceaușescu regime consists in examining its relationship to Marxism-Leninism. As the most striking characteristic of Romanian communism during the seventies and the eighties became its entrenched nationalism, scholars of communism have directed their attention to the investigation of the gradual wearing away of the Marxist-Leninist discourse by that on nation. The conclusion reached by most of the studies

² Irina Livezeanu, *Cultural Politics in Greater Romania, Regionalism, Nation Building, & Ethnic Struggle, 1918-1930* (Ithaca and London: Cornell University Press, 1995).

devoted to the topic was that the nationalist discourse marred or, more accurately said, replaced the purportedly official ideology of the regime.³ Whilst this reasoning is perfectly valid it obscures nevertheless the important role that the process of (re)Westernisation played in the sixties both as a revitalising source for the cultural life of Romania and, more importantly for the present discussion, as the triggering factor for the changes that took place in the cultural policy at the beginning of the seventies. The opening towards the Occident was accompanied by the revival of nationalism, but gradually these two tendencies became incompatible. This incompatibility caused the reconsideration of the relationship between Westernisation, nationalism and Marxism-Leninism, a process that ended up with the riddance of the Westernisation course and the reinforcement of nationalism in a socialist framework.

After all, accommodating the doctrine of Marxism-Leninism with that of nationalism was far easier than keeping the balance between the promotion of nationalism and the opening towards the West. Stalin's theory of 'national in form, socialist in content' was the most visible attempt to solve the contradiction. Following Lenin's enunciation on the topic, Stalin distinguished between bourgeois culture which apparently spoke in the name of the nation but in reality represented and served the interests of the privileged few, and proletarian culture which was equated with the interests of the masses and regarded as the epitome of the national culture.⁴ The accommodation of the Westernisation process of the sixties with Marxism-Leninism and nationalism proved to be far more difficult in practical terms. Whilst nationalism and Westernisation went hand in hand at the end of the sixties, the gradual influence of the Westernisation process threatened the nationalist

³ Katherine Verdery, *National Ideology Under Socialism, Identity and Cultural Politics in Ceaușescu's Romania* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1991).

⁴ 'Proletarian culture does not cancel national culture, but lends it content. National culture, on the other hand, does not cancel proletarian culture, but lends it form. [...] The demand for national culture became a proletarian demand when the proletariat came into power and the consolidation of nations began to proceed under the aegis of the Soviet government.', Joseph Stalin, 'The political task of the university of the peoples of the East', cited in Walter A. Kemp, *Nationalism and Communism in Eastern Europe and the Soviet Union, A Basic Contradiction?* (London: Macmillan Press Ltd., 1999), 81.

stance and obscured the official ideology of the party. The response of the regime to this un-wanted course was a stronger merging of nationalism with Marxism-Leninism in a desperate attempt to block the further effect of Westernisation.

The moment usually considered as the 'landmark' in the (re)affirmation of nationalism as a distinct trend within the State's policy was the IXth Congress of the Romanian Communist Party that opened on July 19, 1965. It was the first to be headed by Ceaușescu in the capacity of General Secretary of the Party, just four months after his investiture in this position. The IXth Congress was perceived then as the beginning of a new era of political independence and reorientation towards national values. Over the years it became part of Ceaușescu's cult as his speech at the Congress was seen as 'a genuine charter of national will ... [which] marked the beginning of a genuine national renaissance in all fields of life.'⁵ Ceaușescu himself referred to this moment in various speeches and, in times of crisis, the Congress was invoked as a cornerstone in the establishment of a separate way for the development of communism in Romania. For instance, as late as October 1989, in his speech before the Enlarged Plenary of the Central Committee of the Romanian Communist Party, Ceaușescu mentioned the distinct path the IXth Congress inaugurated. The reference to the IXth Congress at that specific moment was nothing more than a desperate and unrealistic response to the changes that had occurred throughout Eastern Europe during 1989. Moreover, it was a way of distancing from the reforms that had been initiated by Gorbachev in the late eighties by stating that what was happening in the Soviet Union had long ago been addressed and solved in Romania.⁶

⁵ *România Literară*, July 15, 1982.

⁶ 'It is necessary to underline the historical role the IXth Congress of the Party played, which put an end to the policy of obedience in front of everything that is foreign, to standardisation, conservatism, to the conception of the 'unique model' with regards to the construction of socialism, to the mechanical copying of what is done in other countries and restored to the party, to the people the feeling of dignity, of confidence in our own forces....', Nicolae Ceaușescu, *Expunere cu privire la problemele socialismului, ale activității ideologice, politico-educative, de dezvoltare a conștiinței revoluționare, de formare a omului nou, constructor conștient al socialismului și-comunismului în România*, prezentată la Plenara largită a CC al PCR, 24 October 1989 (Bucharest: Ed. Politică, 1989), 21.

Another issue that is worth discussing here even briefly is the novelty of Ceausescu's nationalism. Contrary to what propaganda sought to emphasise, the nationalist stand of the Ceaușescu regime was not a totally new pronouncement. Initiated by the government of Gheorghe Gheorghiu-Dej towards the end of his rule,⁷ it had been mainly an attempt to escape the Soviet Union's intrusive and disadvantageous economic policy towards Romania.⁸ It was rather a defensive nationalism with a non-linear evolution that tried to contain the Soviet intervention and which manifested openly on very few occasions. By contrast, Ceausescu's independent policy towards Moscow took more radical forms and embraced more than the economic aspect of the problem. Therefore, Ceausescu's independent policy towards Moscow should be seen rather as a continuation of those tendencies put forward by the previous regime, a substantiation of the initial economic nationalism and a reorientation towards praising the past and national values. The issue is important because it accounts for the intensity of the nationalist discourse in the Ceaușescu Era, for its over-tones which were meant to cover the echoes of the previous regime's nationalism.

The attempt to distance himself from the previous regime and to transform the IXth Congress into a turning point in the State policy was realised by using two complementary strategies. Firstly, the reference to Gheorghiu-Dej was minimal. No special tribute was paid to the leader deceased four months earlier, no references to

⁷ The date of Romania's distancing policies towards the Soviet Union is still an issue of controversy. Stephen Fischer Galati maintains that 'as least as early as 1955 Gheorghe Gheorghiu-Dej and his associates were cautiously pursuing national policies first formulated in 1945 and envisaging a possible eventual assertion of independence from the Kremlin' (*The New Rumania. From People's Democracy to Socialist Republic*, Cambridge/Massachusetts: The MIT Press, 1967), 7. Kenneth Jowitt chooses 1962 as the beginning of the Romanian autonomous course (Kenneth Jowitt, *op. cit.*, 198-228).

⁸ Georges Haupt, 'La Genèse du conflit soviéto-roumain', *Revue française des sciences politique*, August 1968, Vol. 18, No. 4; Graeme J. Gill, 'Rumania: Background to Autonomy', *Survey*, Summer 1975, Vol. 21, No. 3 (96), 95-96; Daniel N. Nelson, *Romanian Politics in the Ceaușescu Era* (New York: Gordon and Breach Science Publishers, 1988); Michael Shafir, *Romania: Politics, Economics and Society, Political Stagnation and Stimulated Change* (Boulder, Colorado: Lynne Rienner Publishers, Inc., 1985), 47-48.

his policy or achievements were further made.⁹ Paul Lendvai, at that time a journalist present at the Congress' proceedings, recalled:

Gheorghiu-Dej had been buried amid unprecedented nationwide mourning; the new leaders had eulogised his memory and promised to carry on in his spirit. But to the Western observers, permitted for the first time to be present at a party congress, it was as if he had been in his grave for four decades instead of four months. There were no pictures, no slogans, no decorations recalling the deceased dictator. After a minute of silence at the opening session, no Romanian speaker mentioned his name.¹⁰

Secondly, it is not what Ceaușescu stated at the IXth Congress that transformed it into a moment of reference, but the fact that he put together pronouncements that had been only separately and timidly mentioned until then. Moreover, the novelty was that he established a link between political and economic independence in relation to Moscow. A consequence of this distancing from the Soviet Union was a more open contact with the West, mainly in terms of economic relationships. But what is more important for the present discussion is that the Report encompassed the explicit urge that artists should return to the cultivation of national values, that past culture, especially folk tradition, should become their source of inspiration.

The IXth Congress was accompanied by more or less demonstrative acts that aimed at proving the Party's openness and commitment to its new agenda. For instance, Ceaușescu initiated a series of meetings with intellectuals which were used as a framework for both presenting himself and his ideas and for listening to the other party's opinions or requests. The first clear message he wanted to transmit was that the times were changing, that the previous restrictions and dogmatism were no

⁹ In the years that followed Ceaușescu's accession to power, the discrediting of the previous regime took more diverse forms. One of the most interesting was to allow the intellectuals to write about the horrors of the 'haunting decade' (i.e. the fifties), to contrast the liberties and improvements of the Ceaușescu regime with the terror and repression of the Gheorghiu-Dej leadership. See Doina and Nicolae Harsanyi, 'Romania: Democracy and the Intellectuals', *East European Quarterly*, XXVII, No. 2, June 1993.

¹⁰ Paul Lendvai, *Eagles in Cobwebs, Nationalism and Communism in the Balkans* (London: Macdonald and Company Publishers Ltd, 1970), 316.

longer on the Party's agenda. Furthermore, Ceaușescu wanted to convey the message that the Party and especially its new leadership were willing to collaborate with the intellectuals for the mutual benefice of both parties. He aimed at establishing a sort of alliance between the Party and the intellectuals by assuring them of the 'normalisation' of the cultural environment whilst asking them 'to recognise his good intentions, to support them, and to surround him with sympathy'.¹¹ The meetings took place under the totally new slogan of 'diversity of styles' and 'exchange of opinions' and offered the intellectuals the opportunity to express their views, their frustrations and their expectations. Moreover, the meetings had the character of a working session as they were organised separately with the representatives of each artistic union (Writers' Union, Artists' Union, Film Directors' Union, etc). They addressed the specific problems of each artistic branch and exposed the general views and requirements of the new leadership. The impression that this series of meetings left upon artists was that that the new leadership was really interested in listening and taking seriously the intellectuals' ideas, that the accent put on national culture was not only a declamatory statement, but that, finally, intellectuals might play again an important, consultative role in the elaboration of cultural policy.

A different strategy through the agency of which Ceaușescu tried to gain the sympathy of the intellectuals was that of playing the role of a justice-maker when cases of writers being stopped from publishing on ideological grounds were brought forward. The most 'demonstrative' case 'solved' by Ceaușescu was that of the poet Leonid Dimov. Dimov was an *oneirist* poet who had been under the attack of the dogmatic critics for a long period.¹² During a meeting of the Writers' Union that Ceaușescu attended and where the case of Leonid Dimov was discussed, the

¹¹ Dumitru Popescu, *Elefanții de porțelan, Scene și personaje în umbra Cortinei de Fier, Memorii Transfigurate* (București: MATCH București, n. y.), 27.

¹² Literature produced in the sixties by the '*oneirists*' (term deriving from the Greek *oneiros*, i.e. dream) - a group gathered around the writer Dumitru Țepeneag and the poet Leonid Dimov - and characterised by the withdrawal in a 'dream-like world', untouched by time or social concreteness in which art for art's sake was sovereign. See for a description of this literary trend Michael Shafir, *Romania: Politics, Economics and Society, Political Stagnation and Simulated Change* (Boulder: Lynne Rienner Publishers, Inc., 1985), 168-169.

Romanian leader was not only open to the discussion of the case, but also endorsed Dimov by stating again that the 'freedom of creation' and the 'diversity of styles' were encouraged by the Party and its leadership. He even made an un-expected gesture: he invited Dimov in front of the whole audience and warmly shook his hand. Apart from altering Dimov's status (for a while), this rather theatrical gesture was seen as a sign of genuine solidarity between the new leadership and the community of intellectuals in general, as a new type of relationship established between the two parties. It also secured Ceaușescu's image as a supreme distributor of justice, an image that persisted for years and produced the overarching theme of Ceaușescu as the right leader whose initiatives and good intentions were sabotaged by the incompetence or mal-intentions of the apparatus' personnel.¹³ Furthermore, these meetings and these kinds of enthusiastic moments contributed to the establishment of a certain solidarity and growing confidence in the intellectuals' community. Precisely this solidarity between various groups of intellectuals and their centrifugal influence upon opinions and tastes in the cultural field triggered the abrupt and decisive change of policy at the very beginning of the seventies.

The period of liberalisation at the end of the sixties undoubtedly represented a change in the cultural life of Romania. Not only did censorship become less severe in those years, the heavily compromised cultural figures of the socialist realist period were replaced with new ones (sometimes formerly marginalised or even imprisoned intellectuals), but there was also a feeling that the unique model was finally abolished and intellectuals were again free to create according to their own artistic vocations. The conjunction between openness towards Western influences

¹³ For instance, in a meeting of the 'Decorative Art' Section of the Romanian Artists' Union in May 1969, Ceaușescu was invoked as the person who would understand better than the Section's leadership the difficulties through which the rank and file members of the section were passing through: '[I would like that] in the future [the Bureau of the 'Decorative Art' Section] *be closer to the soul* [my emphasis] and activity of the artists; it would not take so long to the comrades from the Bureau to visit rapidly [our studios] and to see what artists work. I believe that the General Secretary, Comrade Nicolae Ceaușescu, would not remain indifferent to the titanic effort that artists put [into their work] if he heard how artists create the ceramics which was so much appreciated...' (Comrade Chesoiu, ASB, *fond* 2239, UAP, File 13/1969, *Minutes of the Meeting of the 'Decorative Art' Section*, May 26 1969), 12.

and resurgence of national culture made both processes seem natural and guaranteed indeed the 'diversity of styles', the motto of the new leadership.

Apart from the general changes mentioned above, the most influential factor in the field of visual arts was the exposure of the Romanian artistic milieu to foreign artistic trends and ideas. The exposure was three-fold. First of all, a number of foreign exhibitions were opened in Bucharest which had a powerful impact upon the artistic community and offered food for thought for years to come. That was the case with the exhibition devoted to the School of Paris, open in 1968, and in which Romanian artists could see works by Vieira da Silva, Soulages, Hartung, Bissière, Victor Brauner, etc. Equally important was the manifestation centred on the American School of Painting opened in 1969.¹⁴ Works by Archile Gorky, Jackson Pollock, Willem de Kooning, Roy Lichtenstein or Andy Warhol could be seen by artists and public at large.¹⁵ Other less ample but similarly inspiring exhibitions were to be organised in Romania during the same years ('Henri Moore' in 1966, 'Paul Klee' in 1969, 'Contemporary Italian Art', 1968, etc).

Secondly, Romanian artists were kept informed about some of the new trends in the international artistic life through the agency of *Arta* review, which changed its appearance by giving space to commentaries or simple notes on foreign artistic events. A new section called 'Meridians' was introduced which provided an overview of the main international artistic events.¹⁶ Articles, especially on the salient figures of the historic avant-garde, were published as well.¹⁷ Theoretical texts by internationally famous art critics such as René Huyghe or Herbert Read

¹⁴ The title of the exhibition was 'The Disappearance and Re-emergence of Image: American Painting after 1945', Magda Cârneci, *Artele plastice în România, 1945-1989* (Bucharest: Meridiane, 2000), 88.

¹⁵ Ibid.

¹⁶ For instance, in the first issues of 1965 notes on exhibitions open in France and the USA were present in the newly launched section 'Meridians': 'The Great Exhibitions of 1965 in France', *Arta*, 2/1965, 'The Retrospective Max Beckmann in New York', *Arta*, 3-4/1965.

¹⁷ Maria Benedict, 'Amedeo Modigliani (1884-1920)', *Arta*, 1/1965; Mariana Vanci, 'Fernard Léger', *Arta*, 2/1965; George Oprescu, 'Picasso', *Arta*, 12/1966.

were translated and published during those years.¹⁸ Some foreign art journals were reviewed more or less regularly in that period (*L'Oeil*, *Jardin des Arts*, *Studio International*). But the most significant alteration in the review's format was the use of reproductions of the works cited. This was a tremendous innovation after years of dry and suffocating socialist realism. As a matter of fact, this change had occurred two years earlier, in 1963, when the format of *Arta* had suffered a drastic transformation. Although the majority of texts that dealt with contemporary international currents were critical or at least ironical and always vigilant to proclaim the superiority of the autochthonous creation, the 'inferiority' of Western art was at least 'proved' by images.¹⁹ This also confirms that the process of liberalisation was a linear one throughout the sixties, that the new regime of Ceaușescu only deepened an already existing reality.

Thirdly, some of the Romanian artists had the opportunity to travel abroad, to participate in international competitions (Sao Paolo, Venice Biennale, Paris Biennale, etc) and to get accustomed to the latest artistic tendencies. As a result of those various forms of contact with the Western art, a diversification of Romanian art could be observed. Besides the thematic art characteristic for the previous decade, an art that tended to align with fashionable Western tendencies emerged. Hardly tolerated by the old, established critics in Romania, contested as incongruous with the Romanian art tradition, the artists who started producing works of art influenced by Western trends were, strangely enough, internationally promoted by the establishment as a sign of aligning Romanian art with the newest (or what seemed 'newest' for the Romanian artists) trends in the West.²⁰

This opening towards the Western culture had a remarkable impact upon the Romanian artistic community. Not only did artists become aware of the latest

¹⁸ René Huyghe, 'The Historical Significance of Art', *Arta* 1/1970; René Huyghe, 'The Artist and the Social Milieu', *Arta*, 2/1970.

¹⁹ In the first two issues of *Arta* in 1963, works by Calder, Tinguely, Lurçat, Braque or Brâncuși were reproduced.

²⁰ Ruxandra Juvara-Minea, *Participarea României la Bienala de la Veneția* (București: Vremea, 2000).

artistic developments in the Occidental art and attempt to emulate them, but they gained confidence in advancing artistic solutions that were in sharp contrast with what had previously been produced in Romania. The review *Arta* is again a sensible indicator of the changes registered in those years. The most significant difference was the space that was allotted to the visual innovations of the young generation of artists. They were usually presented in individualised articles that included for the first time their photographs as well. The artists' presentations were usually set in their studios, presenting their artistic biography as well as their work in progress. This marked a sharp contrast with the previous way of presenting artists and their works which paid no attention to artists as individualities and even less to their artistic conceptions.²¹ The new manner of presenting the Romanian artists in the pages of *Arta* accounts both for a shift in the acceptance of the artist as a creative individual and for the perception of the work of art not only as a finite product that was worth displaying for propaganda purposes but also as an embodiment of a certain conception worth being explored.

Apart from this phenomenon of trying to get accustomed to the post-war international artistic developments, Romanian cultural life witnessed a series of events that were influential for the evolution of Romanian art even after the cultural policy was radically changed at the beginning of the seventies. The most spectacular were the exhibitions of the Romanian artists Ion Țuculescu and Ioan Mirea,²² the first clear manifestations of abstract art in Romania after 1945.²³ Especially the retrospective exhibition of Ion Țuculescu (1910-1963) had an immense impact as he had been an artist of incontestable value and originality, marginalised by the

²¹ A similar phenomenon, of *captatio benevolentiae*, is identified by Jeffrey Brooks on the eve of the First Congress of Soviet Writers in August 1934. Writers became 'actors in the performance...beside explorers, airplane pilots, and government leaders', having their photographs published in journals and their works described for a larger audience. Jeffrey Brooks, *Thank you, Comrade Stalin!, Soviet Public Culture from Revolution to Cold War* (Princeton, New Jersey: Princeton University Press, 2000), 110.

²² Ioan Mirea (1912-1962), painter of landscapes, especially of marine landscapes, reached the phase of abstract painting through wood carving and approached a lyric abstractionism embedded with spiritual/religious elements. See Dan Grigorescu, *Idee și sensibilitate, Direcții și tendințe în arta românească contemporană* (București: Editura Meridiane, 1991), 23.

²³ Magda Cârneci, *op. cit.*, 74.

previous regime but who had continued to pursue his own artistic agenda despite poverty and isolation. Because the retrospective was organised by the State Committee for Culture and Art, an institution subordinated to the Central Committee, the rediscovery of Țuculescu's work was a huge success for the political and cultural establishment.²⁴ It was received as a positive sign by the artists' community and as a concrete proof that the highly circulated syntagma of 'diversity of styles' was not merely a demagogic formula.²⁵ Furthermore, it had a huge impact upon the Romanian public at large and was considered a 'decisive experiment, meant to dismiss the legend of the public's lack of receptivity for the personal, original art...'.²⁶ The exhibition was also a turning point in the Romanian cultural life precisely because Țuculescu was not just any kind of abstractionist, but one who was inspired massively by the traditional folk creation. His interest in folk art, especially in rugs and tapestry, had led him to a folkloric abstractionism in the forties that gradually had evolved towards a totemic abstractionism during the late years of his life.²⁷ Probably this was precisely the reason why his work caught the interest of the new regime.²⁸ His work inaugurated the return to the investigation of folklore as a source of inspiration for the high art. It also was the point of departure for a series of currents that survived up to the eighties.

Țuculescu's work also had another important outcome. It was displayed at the XXXIII Venice Biennale in 1966 as a token of political liberalisation and artistic renewal.²⁹ The novelty of Țuculescu's creation triggered a genuine interest within

²⁴ In his volume of dialogues with Ioan Tecșa, Dumitru Popescu, at that time deputy minister in the Ministry of Culture, recalls his personal involvement in the rediscovery of Țuculescu: how he went to his home (a modest block apartment), met his family ('whose members were dying of starvation'), found approximately 600 works left by the artist, paid a generous sum in advance for acquisitions, advised the Minister of Foreign Affairs to purchase his works for the Romanian embassies abroad, etc., cf. Dumitru Popescu, *Am fost și cioplitor de himere: convorbire realizată de Ioan Tecșa* (București: Ed. Expres, 1994), 102-103.

²⁵ See for the impact of the retrospective exhibition of Țuculescu upon the artistic community Radu Bogdan, 'Semnificația operei lui Ion Țuculescu', *Arta*, 3-4, 1965.

²⁶ Ion Frunzetti, 'La încheierea retrospectivei Țuculescu', *Contemporanul*, April 9, 1965.

²⁷ Magda Cârneli, *Ion Țuculescu* (București: Meridiane, 1984).

²⁸ The same Dumitru Popescu offers us a lead regarding this issue. His recollections of the Țuculescu case are inserted precisely in an ampler discussion on the return to national values and national culture., Dumitru Popescu. *op. cit.*, 102.

²⁹ Ruxandra Juvara-Minea, *op. cit.*, 168.

the art critics' community.³⁰ Unfortunately, political changes and the accent put on folk creation were soon to be reflected as well in the selection of artists and works for international events.

Another important event at the end of the sixties was the international colloquium on the work of Constantin Brâncuși. The rediscovery of this important figure of modern art, one of the founders of the abstract current in sculpture, rebuked publicly by the regime of Gheorghe Gheorghiu-Dej,³¹ was an essential step forward for the acknowledgement of diversity and the acceptance of the abstractionist tendency in art. The participation in the colloquium of both foreign and Romanian specialists on Brâncuși conferred a feeling of normalisation, of genuine collaboration between Romania and the West. Furthermore, the colloquium was accompanied by the opening of various exhibitions in Bucharest that encompassed the most progressive artistic endeavours of Romanian artists.³²

The changed cultural environment and the sensation that the unique model could indeed be freely challenged, made critics and artists react against the most evident artistic manifestations that were still promoting an obsolete, realist socialist style. This was a very interesting and telling phenomenon proving both the new political and cultural atmosphere of the mid sixties and, more importantly, the solidarity of opinion of most of the artists and art critics in condemning the socialist realist model. The case that triggered perhaps the most vivid debate was that of the sculptor Constantin Baraschi and of his proposed version of a statue of Mihail Eminescu.³³ Constantin Baraschi (1902-1966), a sculptor of the old generation, with a solid classical formation and an often eclectic style, had been very successful

³⁰ Dragoș Vrâncianu, 'Ion Țuculescu la Bienala de la Veneția', *Luceafărul*, July 2, 1966 and Petru Comarnescu, 'Ion Țuculescu la Bienala de la Veneția, Ecouri', *Arta Plastică*, 7-8/1966.

³¹ The artist left by testament his studio and the works comprised in it to the Romanian state under the condition that his studio be reconstructed in its existing form. The Romanian state officially declined the offer along with the rejection of the abstract current Brâncuși stood for. The studio of Brâncuși can be seen today in front of Centre Pompidou in Paris.

³² Magda Cârneci, *Artele plastice în România, 1945-1989* (Bucharest: Meridiane, 2000), 85.

³³ Mihail Eminescu (1850-1889), poet, journalist, writer, rediscovered in the period of re-nationalisation of the Romanian culture, became 'the poet' *par excellence* in the Ceaușescu Era.

before the war by approaching themes of the ancient mythology or of the Christian repertoire.³⁴ After the war he became one of the most representative figures of socialist realism, whose name was irrevocably linked with the production of Stalin's imagery in Romania in the early fifties. Baraschi's statue representing Eminescu won the competition for the decoration of the little park in front of the main concert hall in Bucharest, the Romanian Atheneum. What generated the immediate and prompt reaction of the artistic community was the fact that the statue was conceived according to the outmoded principles of socialist realism, in a cold and trivial academism. Art critics were quick in denouncing the inadequacy of Baraschi's proposal both in terms of concept and realisation.

The 'attack' was initially launched by the young art critic Dan Hăulică who accused the sculptor of both plagiarism³⁵ and 'lack of artistry'.³⁶ Although Hăulică did not use the word 'academism' he totally denounced the 'ugliness' of Baraschi's sculpture.³⁷ The word itself is suggestive for the newly aesthetic climate and the incompatibility of the old visual forms with the new tendencies in Romanian art in the middle of the sixties. Hăulică also questioned the validity of the contest that imposed Baraschi's sculpture, arguing for more 'rigorous and effective competitions'.³⁸ Once the debate was launched by Hăulică, it moved away from the issue of plagiarism³⁹ and focused on the criticism of the obsolete manner in which the statue was realised and on the procedure flaws that accompanied the competition for the statue of Eminescu. The art historian Barbu Brezianu noted the anachronism of the 'correct and conventional ... "monumental" style' employed by Baraschi and his 'photographic' realisation that echoed 19th century monuments.⁴⁰ Argintescu-

³⁴ Vasile Florea, *Arta românească modernă și contemporană* (Bucharest: Meridiane, 1982), 254.

³⁵ Hăulică noticed the resemblance of Baraschi's sculpture with Michelangelo's *Il Pensieroso* as far as the postures of Eminescu and Lorenzo Magnificent were concerned. See Dan Hăulică, 'Acesta nu e Eminescu!', *Contemporanul*, February 5, 1965.

³⁶ Ibid.

³⁷ Ibid.

³⁸ Ibid.

³⁹ The issue of plagiarism was brought up once again by the sculptor Ion Vlad who accused Baraschi of having in general his production too much based on borrowings from other sculptors and epochs. See Ion Vlad, 'Din nou despre monumentul Eminescu', *Gazeta literară*, May 13, 1965.

⁴⁰ Barbu Brezianu, 'Monumentul Eminescu', *Luceafărul*, April 10, 1965.

Amza spoke about a 'typical, pseudo-academic stereotype ... arbitrary and conformist ... a mere cliché of false distinction ... obscured under a calligraphic linearity'.⁴¹ Petru Comarnescu was even more direct in his appreciations. He simply labelled Baraschi's work as 'naturalist vulgarity and [having] ordinary expressivity'.⁴² Ion Frunzetti made instead a detailed morphological analysis of the monument and identified the execution errors that hindered the project.⁴³

Some of the contributors to this debate did not limit themselves to denouncing the mediocrity and inadequacy of Baraschi's work but also circulated the names of several artists considered able to fulfil the task successfully.⁴⁴ Ways to treat such an important project and to meet both the expectations of the artistic community and those of the public were also suggested. For instance, Vasile Nicolescu evoked Brâncuși's intention to work on a monument devoted to Spiru Haret⁴⁵ that would take the form of a fountain and suggest Haret's contribution to the development of the Romanian education. Nicolescu advocated a similar solution, wondering whether a symbolic approach of Eminescu's monument would not be the best solution for the case.⁴⁶ This is an extremely interesting point as it accounts for a different aesthetic and mental environment that could absorb various visual solutions and treat the most serious topics (such as a monument devoted to the national poet Mihai Eminescu) in a manner which was far from the previously dominating academism.

Baraschi also had his defenders. What is symptomatic for this group is that they stood up for Baraschi's work by invoking that the project was the result of a serious competition, presided over by a jury composed of illustrious people of culture. In

⁴¹ Nicolae Argintescu-Amza, 'Monumentul Eminescu', *Luceafărul*, May 22, 1965.

⁴² Petru Comarnescu, 'Monumentul eminescian', *Luceafărul*, March 27, 1965.

⁴³ Ion Frunzetti, 'Monumentul Eminescu', *Luceafărul*, May 8, 1965

⁴⁴ Dan Hăulică spoke about the 'new and fresh forces' who would be excited to create a monument of Eminescu and cited the name of Gheorghe Anghel, the one who would eventually realise the monument. Dan Hăulică, *op. cit.*

⁴⁵ Spiru Haret was an important 19th century professor who contributed to the development of the Romanian higher education.

⁴⁶ Vasile Nicolescu, 'Monumentul Eminescu', *Luceafărul*, April 10, 1965.

other words, the defenders did not use artistic criteria to analyse and back Baraschi's Eminescu, but again, like in older times, they invoked the inviolability of 'authority'. According to Perpessicius – himself a member of the jury – the competition had four successive phases and the winner in each phase was Constantin Baraschi.⁴⁷ The credibility and competence of the jury could not be questioned as it was formed of famous and reputable artists such as the writer Mihail Sadoveanu, a tutelary figure of the Romanian letters, Tudor Vianu, the most respected aesthete of that moment, Vida Geza, Boris Caragea, Ion Jalea, three prestigious sculptors, and the poet Mihai Beniuc.⁴⁸ It is worth mentioning that while all persons mentioned above were respectable artists, exceptional or important representatives of Romanian culture, some of them had been morally compromised by supporting the new communist power after 1945. Some produced socialist realist works or got involved in politics at different levels. For instance, Mihail Sadoveanu, the author of the early and notorious piece *Lumina vine de la Răsărit*, 1945 (The Light Comes from the East), member in the Presidium of the Great National Assembly of the Popular Republic of Romania and President of the Writers' Union, *inter alia*, was probably the emblematic figure for what compromise had meant among established and influential figures of Romanian culture. Mihai Beniuc, a modest poet but a totally compromised figure with his dictatorial leadership in the Writers' Union, with his prolific production of laudatory poetry for the Party and its leaders,⁴⁹ was another member of the jury whose artistic views and especially 'moral competence' might have been questionable. Perpessicius and Vianu were respectable men of letters but their reputation had been spoiled by their rapid yet not totally enthusiastic alignment to the new cause. Similarly, Geza, Caragea and Jalea, talented and innovative sculptors, often created works of art whose folk, realist or militant thematic served the official ideology well. Therefore, the composition of

⁴⁷ Panaitescu Perpessicius, 'Monumentul Eminescu', *Contemporanul*, February 26, 1965.

⁴⁸ Ibid. The same point is made by the writer Demonstene Botez who equaled the press attacks against Baraschi to a contestation of the professionalism of the jury's members. See Demonstene Botez, 'Hannibal ad portas', *Contemporanul*, February 12, 1965.

⁴⁹ See for instance, Beniuc's suggestively called volumes 'Partidul m-a-nvățat' (The Party Taught Me), 1954 and 'Cîntec pentru tovarășul Gheorghe Gheorghiu-Dej' (Song for Comrade Gheorghe Gheorghiu-Dej), 1951, in Marin Nițescu, *Sub zodia proletcultismului, Dialectica puterii* (Bucharest: Humanitas, 1995), 295-296.

the jury might have raised question marks and its decision might have been biased. The truth about how the competition was organised was disclosed during the debate by George Oprescu, a senior art historian and respected authority in the field of arts. Baraschi's project was short-listed for the final phase of the competition along with that of a younger sculptor, Ovidiu Maitec. When the commission met for the final deliberation, a member of the jury was absent. The votes were given equally to the two competitors. Nevertheless the procedure required that all members of the jury vote and therefore the commission paid a visit to the absent member and convinced him to give his vote to Baraschi without him actually seeing Baraschi's latest plans.⁵⁰ The fact that Oprescu divulged in a press article the errors and arrangements that altered the outcome of the Eminescu official competition was indeed a sign of a certain autonomy and self-respect on behalf of the art critics' and historians' community. It also proved that the climate was changing, that some basic truths could be said and that the authority and morality of the cultural big names of the day could be challenged.

The debate that lasted more than three months had in the end a very concrete outcome: the replacement of Baraschi's Eminescu with the one executed by Gheorghe Anghel (1904-1966), a sculptor very much outside the official stream. There are a few important remarks that should be made about this debate. First of all it is interesting to note that those who got involved in denouncing the project of Constantin Baraschi were both young (Dan Hăulică) and elder art critics (George Oprescu, Petru Comarnescu). Although the debate was initiated by a young art critic (Dan Hăulică), he was soon seconded by established figures of the art criticism and from this point of view there was no suspicion of a generation-biased approach. Secondly, Anghel, the sculptor supported by most of art critics and historians belonged to the same generation with that of the contested artist, Baraschi. Therefore, the attack launched against Baraschi did not aim at pointing to a generation conflict but simply denounced an obsolete style whose production was

⁵⁰ George Oprescu, 'Monumentul Eminescu', *Contemporanul*, February 26, 1965.

representative for the previous epoch.⁵¹ Finally, the debate and the selection of Anghel's Eminescu had significant (although temporary) consequences upon the way in which art critics began to perceive their role and subsequently do their jobs, as well as upon the way artists themselves conceived their works. The successful outcome of art critics' and historians' action gave them a certain feeling of influence and authority. To a certain extent, the artistic community rediscovered itself through this episode, art critics and historians learned how to make use of their tools, a new feeling of professional solidarity and efficiency emerged that gave hope of more to come. It also paved the way for similar debates and contestations in the very few years left until the return to a harder line.⁵² Moreover, the display in a central public place of Anghel's statue, with its linear hieratic form, opened the way for further experiments and innovation that led even to the erection of non-figurative statues.⁵³

The question of how deep and extended was the process of liberalisation at the end of the sixties still remains. It was perceived *post-factum* in the most diverse ways. Due to the fact that it was preceded by the decade of hard socialist realism and followed after 1971 by a return to that artistic-ideological method, the second part of the sixties was generally seen as an exciting interlude between the two, a period of change and openness. Furthermore, the political power's attempts to create new links with the community of intellectuals and the central repositioning of the topic of nation and national culture on its agenda made some authors refer to a 'myth of reconciliation' between the political power and intellectuals, between the inter-war tradition and the end of the sixties.⁵⁴ Other scholars were more cautious in idealizing the period and pointed to the limits of the liberalisation process which was 'anything

⁵¹ Ioana Vlasiu, 'Momente din evoluția contemporană a sculpturii monumentale în România', *Studii și cercetări de istoria artei*, Seria artă plastică, Tome 25, 1978, 141.

⁵² A similar case was that of the established sculptor Oscar Han and of his statue of Mihai Viteazul whose mannerist realisation was criticised by the same art critic Dan Hăulică. Most of the debate consumed during the works of the 1968 Romanian Artists' Union's National Conference and its impact was less spread than that of contesting the Eminescu Monument. See for this ASB, *fond* 2239, UAP, File 14/1968, *The Third National Conference of the RAU*, 17-19 April 1968, 274.

⁵³ For instance, the project of decorating the Herăstrău Park in Bucharest that comprised both figurative and non-figurative sculptures and which was completed between 1966 and 1967. See for this Ioana Vlasiu. *op. cit.*, 159.

⁵⁴ Sorin Alexandrescu, 'Une culture de l'interstice', *Les Temps modernes*, 1989, Janvier.

but “guided liberalization” at best’.⁵⁵ According to Michael Shafir two main features distinguished the Romanian liberalisation of the mid-sixties compared with the experience of other East European countries such as Poland, Hungary or Czechoslovakia. First of all, the liberalisation was triggered and conditioned by external factors (the conflict with the Soviet Union); it had very little to do with the internal development of Romanian society itself. Secondly, the role played by intellectuals in the process was that of passive spectators; the liberalisation was not initiated by ‘intellectual pressure “from below”’.⁵⁶ This accentuated further the image of the Romanian intellectuals as mere recipients of privileges, who had to be ‘grateful’ for any bits of manoeuvre space bestowed upon them. The most radical view of the period belongs to those analysts who saw it as a time of mere diversion while the leadership consolidated its power base. Victor Frunză spoke in fact about ‘multiple diversions’, especially designed to catch the intellectuals’ attention and support: the diversion of independence from Moscow (Ceaușescu as the maverick of the communist bloc), the diversion of restitution (the restitution of national history, national past, pride, etc), the diversion of economic development and general welfare (the Romanian economic miracle and the opening towards West).⁵⁷

No matter how deep or superficial the process of liberalisation was, or how genuine or directed from above was the transformation, it had important consequences upon the further development of the cultural life in Romania, both in positive and negative terms. The positive part was a modest yet refreshing alignment to the cultural trends in the Occident. This made possible the challenging and partial dismantling of the unique socialist realist model, the emergence of alternative yet timid nuclei of artists and works of art that employed a Western model or had a folk oriented approach. Moreover, the period of liberalisation boosted the self-confidence of the artistic community, made artists group themselves according to ideological and artistic criteria and led them to take public positions against the

⁵⁵ Michael Shafir, *Political Culture, Intellectual Dissent and Intellectual Consent. The Case of Romania* (Jerusalem: The Hebrew University of Jerusalem, The Soviet and East European Research Centre, 1978), 30.

⁵⁶ Ibid, 31.

⁵⁷ Victor Frunză, *Istoria stalinismului în România* (Bucharest: Humanitas, 1990), 504-515.

unique and obsolete model of socialist realism. But besides this opening towards Western and folk models, changes of attitude and (re)configuration of the artistic community, the process of liberalisation also had consequences upon the official art. This issue will be treated more extensively in the chapter devoted to Ceaușescu's image. Suffice to mention at this point of analysis that the exposure to Western tendencies contributed to the redefining of the notion of realism, to its 'enlargement',⁵⁸ by incorporating photographic techniques or elements of pop-art and 'hyper-realism' experimented in the Occidental art of the sixties. As a result of these inclusions, Ceaușescu's image itself suffered deviations from the socialist realist canon, being permeated with photographic quotations or infused with elements of 'hyper-realism'. Furthermore, the rediscovery of the folk tradition and of mediaeval art influenced the way in which Ceausescu's official portrait was conceived. As we will see in chapter 5, the icon, the votive portrait and the mural painting played a role in the elaboration of Ceausescu's portrait both in terms of composition and style.

2.2. *The July Theses*

The period of liberalisation was not to last long. Scared by the consequences of the liberalisation process and by the direction in which things were apparently moving, the Romanian leadership decided to put a sudden stop to the relaxation policy and to return to a hard line of mass mobilisation. The liberalisation course was practically reversed overnight by the issuing of two party documents that were to define the main directions of the cultural policy for the next almost twenty years. These party documents were issued in the summer of 1971 and were later dubbed the July Theses. The purpose of this section is to analyse in depth the content of the July Theses and to assess the impact that they had on the Romanian Artists' Union. The impact of the July Theses is not assessed by focusing on individual reactions but by exploring the response of the Romanian Artists' Union as a corpus of professionals facing a major and intrusive invasion of ideological disturbance. It endeavours to

⁵⁸ Magda Cârneli, *Artele plastice în România, 1945-1989* (Bucharest: Meridiane, 2000), 101.

investigate to what extent the July Theses altered the general artistic discourse as well as the works of art produced afterwards by the Romanian artists. The section consists of three main parts. The first one attempts to offer a comprehensive overview of what the July Theses stated. The second part endeavours to evaluate the impact of the July Theses' launch in the Romanian Artists' Union. This evaluation is made mainly on the basis of archival material, namely the minutes of the UAP's meetings that took place immediately after the event. The final part attempts to draw some conclusions regarding the importance of the Theses for the artistic and ideological output during the period of mature 'ceaușescuism'.

The July Theses were elaborated in the aftermath of an Asian tour made by the Ceaușescu during June 1971 in China, North Korea, North Vietnam and Mongolia. The influence of this visit on the cultural policy has been often overestimated, being seen as the direct cause of the U-turn that occurred that year. Especially Western observers had the tendency to equate the visit with an illuminating experience that profoundly influenced Ceaușescu and determined him to implement a totally new agenda in the field of art and political education. It is indeed true that he was profoundly impressed there by the popular mobilisation he witnessed and by the power and status of the Party. He was especially moved by the North Korean example, where the total commitment and abnegation of the population represented for him a striking impetus. As Daniel Chirot puts it in a concise passage, the features which struck Ceaușescu while visiting North Korea were:

The discipline, the cleanliness of Pyongyang, the obedient marching masses, the enormous degree of self-reliance and independence, and most of all, the ability of the Party to mobilise such a tremendous effort on behalf of national development.⁵⁹

⁵⁹ Daniel Chirot, *Modern Tyrants, The Power and Prevalence of Evil in our Age* (New Jersey: Princeton University Press, 1994), 240.

But to explain a shift of such amplitude only as a result of a visit, no matter how impressive, might be a little bit too much.⁶⁰ Signs of concern and discontent with the course of the liberalisation were already present in Ceaușescu's speeches at least a few years back. Michael Shafir argues that as early as 1968 there were passages in Ceaușescu's speeches that indicated an intention to halt the further liberalisation of the cultural life and to re-impose a stricter control over cultural matters. For instance, he cites from Ceaușescu's speech at the National Conference of the Romanian Writers' Union in 1968, in which attempts to re-introduce the pattern of the 'positive hero' as the kernel of literary creation were made:

Our society needs a militant literature, inspiring the masses to an even richer conscious activity, mobilizing consciousness, contributing to the strengthening of the moral and political unity of the entire people...Literature should illustrate ... that his life [of the hero of the socialist epoch] is imbued with revolutionary pathos and socialist ideals, that above all he cares about the interests of the collective, that he devotes himself with the entire pathos of his work to the cause of socialism, to the cause of the people...In this context, it is even more difficult to understand the tendency manifested by some writers, fortunately just a handful, to ignore the fundamental problems of social existence... Such a path inevitably leads to ... spiritual sclerosis, estrangement from those for whom he must write, inability to communicate with the large mass of readers.⁶¹

Furthermore, Monica Lovinescu - who published between 1990 and 1995 her weekly Radio Free Europe reports that she had written on the cultural life of Romania for almost four decades - also identified signs of reversion, moderation, reconsideration as early as 1970. Lovinescu mainly pointed to the articles that some influential literary figures had published against the 'excesses' of the new course and commented on these incipient but determined steps of restraining the

⁶⁰ Even Katherine Verdery, one of the experts on cultural policy during Ceaușescu's period, considers the Asian tour in 1971 as the trigger for the alteration of cultural policy and, implicitly, of Ceaușescu's cult. Katherine Verdery, *op. cit.*, 186.

⁶¹ Michael Shafir, *op.cit.*, 42-43.

liberalisation process.⁶² Dumitru Popescu, the already mentioned high ranking official, brings a similar testimony in his volume of dialogues with Ioan Tecşa. He maintains that the shift in the party's orientation was the result of a cumulative process and that the Chinese example was employed only as an example and justification for the new orientation:

It seems to me facile to explain an entire ideological and political turn in a party and in the head of a leader through the impressions picked up in a visit abroad. [...] He was struck by the type of Asian performance. He liked the Chinese opera and the Korean ballet, seeing in them the best way of praising the so-called national hero. He yearned to become the salient character of such an opera. Moreover, he liked mass performances in China and Korea as manifestations of an organised enthusiasm. He was moved by their impression of spontaneity and élan. [...] In 1971, he realised that the political course discretely induced by him after 1968 [...] was taking place too slowly, that the liberal inertia was more powerful than the chilling brought on from inside [...] and he decided to draw publicly a line of demarcation, to redefine the new position, remarked by few, ignored by many. [...] Maybe he took advantage as well of the confusion resulted from the visit to China: his gesture did not appear as singular, therefore hard to understand, but as part of a large trend whose protagonist was the red colossus, so original and audacious.⁶³

On the other hand, if one considers the transformations that took place in Eastern Europe at the end of the sixties and the beginning of the seventies and the general process of moving back onto more conformist positions after the Prague Spring, one may argue that what happened in Romania in 1971 was not in the least a singular experiment, influenced by 'exotic' models, but part of a new retreat to more orthodox stands. Ceauşescu's initiative echoed similarly drastic actions, in political, social or cultural fields that seem to have come in cascade in a very short interval: in

⁶² Monica Lovinescu, *Unde scurte, Jurnal indirect*, (Bucharest: Humanitas, 1990).

⁶³ Dumitru Popescu, *Am fost şi cioplitor de himere: convorbire realizată de Ioan Tecşa* (Bucharest: Ed. Express, 1994), 208.

Yugoslavia, towards the end of 1971, Tito undertook big purges in the Croatian communist party and a few months later eliminated the 'liberals' from the Serbian and Macedonian leaderships in an attempt to preserve his personal power and the monopoly of his party; in Bulgaria, that very year, the forced assimilation of the Turk minority began; in Hungary, at a plenary meeting of the communist party in November 1972 'Kadarism' was openly criticised; the same year, in Hungary, the authorities in Budapest instigated repressive actions against the circle of philosophers and sociologists grouped around György Lukács.⁶⁴

In a recently published document, the origin of the 'Theses' is somehow clarified. The document represents the minutes of the meeting of the Executive Committee of the Central Committee of the Romanian Communist Party that took place on June 25, 1971 and in which Ceaușescu presented a report on the Asian tour. He mentioned the powerful impression that the mass welcoming in Pekin had upon him⁶⁵ as well as the theatre and ballet performances that he largely appreciated.⁶⁶ The most interesting of all was nevertheless the passage in which Ceaușescu detailed the origin of the future 'Theses'. He was very careful to state that he had thought about drawing a plan for the improvement of propaganda before having left for Asia and that what he had seen there only confirmed the rightness of his initiative:

⁶⁴ Mircea Iorgulescu, 'Timpi și timpuri', *Vatra*, Vol. 8, No. 365, 2001, 48.

⁶⁵ 'The reception was exceptional both at the airport and on behalf of the population; then in the city [we were greeted] by hundreds and hundreds of thousands of people, not in a lump as it happens at us, but in a very organised way – with schools, fanfare, sportive games, dances. The same [happened] in Korea. And I think we have something to learn from this, everything was organised.', 'Minutes of the Meeting of the Executive Committee of the Central Committee of the Romanian Communist Party, June 25, 1971', in *Analele Sighet*, 9, *Anii 1961-1972: Țările Europei de Est între speranțele reformei și realitatea stagnării* (Bucharest: Fundația Academia Civică, 2001), 838.

⁶⁶ 'We saw also the 'Women's Division'. Some comrades said that it was rudimentary, but we would like to have as well these kinds of performances. They have a very good thematic as far as the transformation of man is concerned. In general, they contrast the imperialist mentality with the new relationships and this is something that we do not do. We saturated the cinematography with adventure movies and the theatre with Occidental shows. We took out the revolutionary shows and introduced new ones without any content. The same happened at television; we keep talking and we do nothing.', *Ibid*, 840.

Before leaving [for the Asian tour] we had a Secretariat meeting and there we decided to prepare a material for the plenary because our propaganda is unsatisfactory, it does not correspond to the tasks of educating the youth and the people in general. Therefore we stated it before we left for China. But what we saw in China and Korea demonstrates that the conclusion we reached is right.⁶⁷

The July Theses consisted of two speeches delivered by Ceaușescu himself. The first, entitled *Proposals of Measures for the Improvement of Political-Ideological Activity, of Marxist-Leninist Education of Party Members, of all Working People*, was given before the Central Committee of the Romanian Communist Party on July 6. It was elaborated in a strict, severe Party style, which left little room for speculation on the importance that Ceaușescu gave to the content. The second speech, *Exposition to the Work Meeting of the Party Aktiv from the Sphere of Ideology and of Political and Cultural-Educational Activity*, delivered on July 9, was written in a more personal, although imperative way. These two speeches inaugurated what was to become known as the 'Mini Cultural Revolution', named after 'The Great Proletarian Revolution'. It is interesting to note in this context that the term 'cultural revolution' was not at all employed in mass media at that time. It was a term coined by Western observers which entered the Romanian arena of debate only after 1989.⁶⁸ This could be interpreted as a supplementary proof that the Chinese Cultural Revolution was only a triggering factor, whereas the 'July Theses' followed in fact the inner logic of Ceaușescu's consolidation of power. On the other hand, it would have been a too open provocation of the Soviet power to employ freely in mass media a term that was so clearly identifiable with the Chinese communism.

The launch of the 'July Theses' meant the breaking off with the former reconciliation strategy towards the society and a return to the hard line of ideological and mobilisational activity. It was the 'first aggressive and unveiled

⁶⁷ Ibid, 840.

⁶⁸ Mircea Iorgulescu, *op. cit.*, 47.



outburst of Ceaușescuism'⁶⁹ that was to be followed by other unremitting similar outbursts. More precisely, the leader's initiative concretised in a neo-Stalinist-like attack against intellectuals and the relative freedom achieved by them in the period which followed Stalin's death. It was especially directed against the young generation of intellectuals who matured at the end of the sixties in a climate of liberalisation and who were seen by the leadership as having grown dangerously apart from the basic principles of communist ideology. This was in fact an important difference between the Chinese Cultural Revolution and what happened in Romania from 1971 on. Whilst the Chinese Cultural Revolution called into question the party and more generally authority in all its forms (apart from that of the supreme leader),⁷⁰ the 'July Theses' did not intend to touch upon the very structure of the higher apparatus. Furthermore, whilst Mao was aware of the emergence of a 'new class'⁷¹ within the party and state bureaucracy and thought that the main threat of restoration consisted in its consolidation,⁷² Ceaușescu did not direct his attack against the apparatus. On the contrary, the 'July Theses' resulted in a strengthening of the apparatus and the subsequent similar documents did nothing more than to increase its power further.⁷³ Therefore, the 'July Theses' did not affect the higher echelons of the political power, but intellectuals as a group. Their immediate consequences were the tightening up of control over cultural institutions and the reinforcement of the socialist realist principles. Moreover this moment was also seen by scholars interested in the Romanian communist phenomenon as the turning point in the increase of Ceaușescu's personal and arbitrary interventions in policy-making. Katherine Verdery maintains that the 'July Theses' represented the beginning of the period that culminated in 1974 with the consolidation of Ceaușescu's political position and which set the tone for the cultural policy and, implicitly, for his personality cult.⁷⁴

⁶⁹ Cornel Moraru, 'Argument', *Vatra*, Vol. 8, No. 365, 2001, 31.

⁷⁰ Stuart Schram, *The Thought of Mao Tse-Tung* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1989), 171.

⁷¹ Milovan Djilas, *The New Class* (London: Thames and Hudson, 1957).

⁷² Stuart Schram, *op. cit.*, 182.

⁷³ Mircea Iorgulescu, *op. cit.*, 48.

⁷⁴ Katherine Verdery, *op. cit.*, 345.

2.2.1. *The Content of the July Theses*

The core of the 'July Theses' was the idea that ideological activity lagged behind other activities and developments within Romanian society and that the process of establishing the 'new man' failed to receive adequate attention in previous years. Whilst the Party's politics and ideology were correct and their implementation was always a priority of the leadership, the expected results fell short due to loss of focus and ideological vigilance on behalf of the intellectuals. Ceaușescu blamed intellectuals for failing to attain the desired performance and accused them of becoming estranged from the interests of the working class. He vituperated against any intellectualist tendencies, inadequate for a socialist, working class-based society that had as a result the deepening of the gap between intellectuals and the working class. He was particularly harsh with those intellectuals turned activists who - while they were holding key positions in cultural institutions and were supposed to set the line in culture according to the Party policy - let themselves being 'seduced' by their colleagues and started 'translating existentialist literature or studies fashionable in Occident'.⁷⁵ This proves once again that the triggering factor that led to the launch of 'July Theses' was the growing influence of Occidental trends and fashions that penetrated not only the community of intellectuals at large but even the levels of leadership within various cultural institutions. The response of Ceaușescu to this centrifugal, autonomous tendency of the intellectuals was the re-affirmation of the leading role of the working class and, consequently, its status as the main beneficiary of artistic and literary production.⁷⁶ This was why the entire artistic creation had to be conceived according to the basic principles of socialist realism, whose main purpose was the socialist education.

In order to achieve this, Ceaușescu stated a series of practical measures that had to be implemented in the shortest time possible and with maximum efficiency. First, he

⁷⁵ Romulus Rusan, 'Tezele' și reversul lor', in *Analele Sighet, 9, Anii 1961-1972: Țările Europei de Est între speranțele reformei și realitatea stagnării* (Bucharest: Fundația Academia Civică, 2001), 856.

⁷⁶ '...the working class, the most advanced class of our society...'. Nicolae Ceaușescu, *Exposition to the Work Meeting of the Party ...* (Bucharest: Ed. Politică, 1971), 38.

reaffirmed 'the necessity to strengthen the leading role of the Party in all the fields of political-educational activity'.⁷⁷ Consequently, all territorial Party organisations and all individuals entrusted with the realisation of this plan became responsible for the fulfilment of these measures. Even though not explicitly stated, punitive repercussions were implied. Ceaușescu placed responsibility on each individual by vehemently underlining that every person appointed in a certain position had obtained that position through the agency of the Party.⁷⁸ This led to a total politicising of all artistic unions, which had to readjust their internal policy in order to become suitable for the new Party line.⁷⁹ Moreover, the 'July Theses' represented a moment of crisis and repositioning of various individuals within the unions as the moment was perceived as a good opportunity to get access to leading positions through commitment to the new party policy.⁸⁰ Therefore they caused an increase in clashes between different groups which resulted in the division of the unions' members into 'dissidents, assistants or duplicitous ones according to each one's inner resources...'.⁸¹ Ultimately, the leading role of the Party was to be strengthened by the editing of 'anthologies on different issues, comprising passages from Party documents which would offer a clear view on the ideological orientation of our Party'.⁸² In addition, Ceaușescu announced 'the elaboration of theoretical works under the direct guidance of the Secretariat of the Central Committee of the Romanian Communist Party that would draw up the basic theses of the policy and

⁷⁷ Nicolae Ceaușescu, *Proposals of Measures for the Improvement* (Bucharest: Ed. Politica, 1971), 8.

⁷⁸ 'Anyone who is appointed to work in a ministry, in a union, in a trade-union, is appointed there by the Party, by the working class and if he does not accomplish the mission he was entrusted with, he has to be removed and replaced with someone able to carry out the Party policy.', Nicolae Ceaușescu, *Exposition to the Work Meeting of the Party....*, 52.

⁷⁹ The most affected sector was nevertheless mass-media: 'There will be taken measures for the elimination of the unsuitable personnel from radio and television, for the strengthening of the party work within those institutions and for the setting of an internal control group that will remove all programs and shows that do not correspond to the political-educative goals of the party.', 'Protocol of the Meeting of the Secretariat of the Central Committee of the Romanian Communist Party, July 9, 1971', in *Analele Sighet*, 9, *Anii 1961-1972: Țările Europei de Est între speranțele reformei și realitatea stăgnării* (Bucharest: Fundația Academia Civică, 2001), 851.

⁸⁰ 'There will be taken measures for the strengthening of the editorial staff' and leadership of the central and local dailies, of the cultural-artistic publications.', Ibid.

⁸¹ Alexandru Vlad, 'Arheologia tezelor', *Vatra*, Vol. 8, No. 365, 2001, 3.

⁸² 'Protocol of the Meeting of the Secretariat of the Central Committee of the Romanian Communist Party, July 9, 1971', in *Analele Sighet*, 9, *Anii 1961-1972: Țările Europei de Est între speranțele reformei și realitatea stăgnării* (Bucharest: Fundația Academia Civică, 2001), 850.

ideology of our party. These works will be considered Party documents...'.⁸³ This is a very important statement within the Theses because here originated the metamorphosis of Ceaușescu in 'the thinker' *par excellence*, whose theoretical works were not to be employed for the internal use only, but were to be turned into important contributions to the development of the Marxist-Leninist theory.

Apart from these strictly political measures, Ceaușescu stated the need to increase the propaganda campaign. He basically gave an ultimatum, demanding that all means of propaganda be activated, just as in old Stalinist times. He mentioned mass media, but besides that all 'forms of mass political work' were due to become more efficient: 'activity of agitators, of satirical journals, of artistic brigades, of different forms of visual agitation at work places'. The immediate purpose of this campaign was twofold: 'to popularise and generalise positive experience, accomplishments and advanced attitudes, but also to combat actively all negative situations.'⁸⁴ As far as the sphere of artistic activity was concerned, Ceaușescu had a special demand. He required that the orientation of cultural-artistic publications be directed towards the promotion of a socialist militant art and be reinforced by the stigmatisation of any foreign, non-socialist tendencies.⁸⁵

The stigmatisation of Western influences in art and literature was in fact the focus of the Theses. As referred to before, Ceaușescu had occasionally mentioned that the circulation of Occidental materials should be cautious and selective. Even in the euphoric year of 1965, he had balanced his statements on 'diversity of styles' and 'exchange of opinions' with a moderate attitude towards Western culture in which one should distinguish 'what is right and useful' from 'what must be rejected'.⁸⁶ The 'July Theses' came as a reminder of what socialist culture really was. They reduced

⁸³ Ibid.

⁸⁴ Nicolae Ceaușescu, *Proposals of Measures for the Improvement...*, 10.

⁸⁵ 'The strict political orientation will be assured - especially of cultural-artistic publications - the promotion of militant Socialist art and literature and the control of any tendencies of tearing the creation from our Socialist realities, from the large public of working people.' Nicolae Ceaușescu, Ibid., 14.

⁸⁶ *Scînteia*, June 13, 1965, cited in Mary Ellen Fischer, *Nicolae Ceaușescu, A Study in Political Leadership* (Boulder & London: Lynne Rienner Publishers, 1989), 73.

the dilemma of discerning between what was useful and what was not in Western culture by firmly stating the self-sufficiency of the Romanian socialist culture. The intellectual appetite for Western values was catalogued as obsequiousness to foreign ideas and as an attitude of ignorance towards the authentic, ancient traditions of the Romanian culture:

A not very becoming practice has developed, comrades, to look only at what is being done elsewhere, abroad, to resort for everything to imports. This betrays also a certain concept of considering everything that is foreign to be better, a certain – let us say – prostration before what is foreign, and especially before what the Western produces... You well know that in the past Eminescu criticised and made fun of such mentalities in his poems. The more so we have to do it today... We are against bowing down before everything that is foreign... Time has come for [emphasising] the need to resort to [our] own forces in the first place ... and only afterwards to appeal to import.⁸⁷

Ceaușescu's statement resembles the virulent *zhdanovshchina* campaign in the late forties. As in Romania, the main attack in the Soviet Union was directed against intellectuals who showed 'a spirit of servility before everything foreign', who treasured more the formalist, aesthetical currents of the Western art and disregarded the *narodnost* and *partiinnost* that were supposed to be the fundamental criteria to be followed in the art production of the Soviet Union.⁸⁸ Unlike the Romanian anti-Western campaign, the attack against intellectuals in the Soviet Union took individual forms and incriminated important figures (Akhmatova, Zoshchenko, etc) and publications (Leningrad, Zvezda) for basing too much their creation/publishing agenda on Western currents at the expense of the national culture.⁸⁹ In this sense, there is a significant difference between the two anti-intellectual campaigns. Whilst the campaign in the Soviet Union did not aim at denouncing intellectuals as a class

⁸⁷ Nicolae Ceaușescu, *Exposition to the Work Meeting of the Party...*, 49.

⁸⁸ See Matthew Cullerne Bown, *Art under Stalin* (Oxford: Phaidon, 1991), 204.

⁸⁹ Ibid.

but focused on individual examples,⁹⁰ the campaign in Romania targeted intellectuals as a group, questioned their status and utility, tried to reposition them in relationship to the working class or, more precisely, to subordinate them to the interests of the latter. In this respect, the Romanian campaign against intellectuals reminds of the similar lashing out against intellectuals as a group initiated by Mao during his Cultural Revolution.

The July Theses were indeed an extremely important turning point, because they marked the beginning of the period of isolation of Romania from the outside world that would reach alienating dimensions in the eighties. Furthermore, the sudden remoteness from Western influences was accompanied by a more vigorous turn towards the praise of national values and of the national past. In addition to this powerful orientation towards the past Ceaușescu also mentioned the need that artistic creations be inspired by the reality and by the achievements of the Socialist Era. Therefore, the working class was supposed to become the core of any artistic initiative.⁹¹ It is interesting to note that Ceaușescu did not refer at all to the theme of the 'positive hero' in the 'July Theses'. Rather he circulated the image of the collective hero embodied by the working class. This was a significant difference from what is considered as the inspiring model of the Theses, namely the period of high Stalinism. Whilst in the Soviet Union of the thirties and forties the image of the 'positive hero' concretised in individualised examples was cultivated and Stalin's image practically emerged as that of the supreme 'positive hero',⁹² in Ceaușescu's Romania no attention was given to the development of such 'little heroes'. This stood also in sharp contrast with what had happened in Romania during the Gheorghiu-Dej leadership when photographs and short biographies of 'socialist heroes' had been published in the main journals. Nothing similar could be viewed in

⁹⁰ Vladimir Shlapentokh, *Soviet Intellectuals and Political Power The Post-Stalin Era* (Princeton, New Jersey: Princeton University Press, 1990), 10.

⁹¹ 'A special accent will be put on the presentation of the great achievements obtained by the Romanian people, constructor of Socialism, on the underlining of the leading role of the working class [...], on the cultivation of respect towards work, towards the producers of material goods...', Nicolae Ceaușescu, *Proposals of Measures for the Improvement...*, 8.

⁹² Robert C. Tucker, *Stalin in Power, The Revolution from Above, 1928-1941* (New York: W. W. Norton & Company, 1990), 563-567.

Scînteia during the Ceaușescu regime; there was only place for one hero. This blend of nationalism and primary Marxism-Leninism was to become the pattern for the entire development of the artistic movement in the Ceaușescu Era. It also cemented the base for Ceaușescu's future personality cult.

Two years after the launch of the 'July Theses' Ceaușescu became more explicit and clarified what he understood by 'exchange' of information between Romania and the West. When asked by an 'Associated Press' journalist which were the criteria of circulation of Western publications in Romania Ceaușescu responded:

We are adepts of a free exchange of ideas and information among all countries. We consider that under the present conditions of technical and scientific revolution these contacts and exchange of information are of special importance for the progress of any country. We are, however, resolutely against any attempt at using this exchange of information for the propagation of fascist concepts, of racism or of the so-called works of art or literature, which are in contradiction with the principles of humanism, with the education of the people, particularly of the youth, in the spirit of friendship and cooperation.⁹³

Another issue discussed by Ceaușescu in his incisive report was the status of the socialist artist. He stressed that the essence of artistic enterprise was not to be found within a certain school, where one was taught how to become an artist, or in a certain innate vocation, but in the significance of the message to be transmitted. Ceaușescu simply put into parentheses such ingredients as talent and training and stated that anyone who had a message⁹⁴ to transmit was free to do it.⁹⁵ His action

⁹³ Interview given to the 'Associated Press' News Agency, November 30, 1973, in Nicolae Ceaușescu, *Romania on the way of building up the multilaterally developed socialist society, Reports, Articles and Speeches, August 1973-March 1974* (Bucharest: Meridiane Publishing House, 1975), 623.

⁹⁴ It is obvious that the kind of message Ceaușescu had in mind was a Socialist or nationalist message.

⁹⁵ 'The same situation should be at the Faculty of Humanities, which [...] should not produce writers, because there are no writers' faculties in the world; a writer can be even a good worker, a good doctor or a good engineer who has a message to transmit, who knows the life and has talent, anyone is

had a twofold purpose. On the one hand, he aimed at diminishing the status of professional artists, to penetrate and dismantle the usually hermetic and elitist sphere of art creators. On the other hand, he wanted to open the gates for an enormous number of anonymous artists, who would receive by this manoeuvre an important space of authorised action. The effect was an almost total effacing of borders between professionals and amateurs. From here to the initiative of creating a special framework for amateurs' manifestation was just a step that was taken in 1975, when Ceaușescu designed the mass manifestation of 'Song to Romania', that encompassed hundreds of thousands of people, who became basically an inexhaustible source of praising recruits. 'Song to Romania' was, without any doubt, the most ample and shameless form of worshiping a leader in Europe in the eighties. Following Stalin, Ceaușescu found even a new term for this intermingling of national concern and socialist interest and labelled the attitude which was supposed to characterise the artist as 'socialist patriotism',⁹⁶

In a subsequent report, in November 1971,⁹⁷ which encompassed an evaluation of the results that had been achieved in the previous three months, Ceaușescu made a new presentation of the old discourse. What was new, however, was the explanation of some basic terms that were to be ceaselessly utilised during the next decades. The syntagmas were 'realist art' and 'socialist humanism'. The definition of realist art is extremely simple and at the same time categorical:

For some art specialists, socialist realism is synonymous with the creation of certain clichés, of a unique pattern for the entire art. I consider that this kind of understanding of realism is completely wrong [...] When we speak about realist art we think of an art which renders the realities of our country, those of the time we live in, the epoch of great revolutionary, socialist changes.

capable of realising a work of art.' Nicolae Ceaușescu, *Exposition to the work meeting of the Party...*, 61.

⁹⁶ Ibid., 9.

⁹⁷ Nicolae Ceaușescu, *Exposition concerning the Program of the RCP, for the Improvement of Ideological Activity, the Raising of General Level of Socialist Knowledge and that of Masses' Education, for the Establishment of Relationships in our Society Based on the Principles of Socialist and Communist Ethics and Justice* (Bucharest: Editura Politică, 1971).

Could an art, which would not depict, in the most various forms, these grandiose times, be conceived? Of course not! Such an art would be lifeless.⁹⁸

Ceaușescu also discussed the notion of 'socialist humanism', a syntagma that would be in constant circulation in order to emphasise the role and place of the individual in society during Ceaușescu Era:

At the same time, we have to clarify the notion of socialist humanism, which presupposes a more complex understanding of man in society, taken not as an individual, but as a social person, in strong connection and interdependence with his peers, with the interests of large popular masses. Socialist humanism is supposed to render personal happiness in the context of affirmation of the entire people's personality. Starting from here, art filled by socialist humanism has to be devoted to large popular masses, among which personality does not lose itself, but becomes stronger, along with the affirmation and happiness of our entire nation.⁹⁹

The passage strictly delimits the recipients of art works and uses again the same strange overlapping between individual and mass.

The consequences of the 'July Theses' were numerous and touched upon many aspects of social and cultural life: the immediate banning of rock concerts and the diminishing of night life in Bucharest,¹⁰⁰ the substitution of foreign films and music in cinema and television with Romanian music (especially folk music) and films,¹⁰¹ closing of libraries, sorting of books and the return to the famous 'Index' of prohibited volumes and authors just as in the old Stalinist times.¹⁰² Furthermore, compulsory courses of political education for journalists and critics (which had been

⁹⁸ Nicolae Ceaușescu, *Exposition concerning the Program of the RCP...*, 68.

⁹⁹ *Ibid.*, 69.

¹⁰⁰ Paul and Jane T. Michelson, who were at that time Fulbright/IREX grant holders, recall this immediate effect of the Theses., cf. Paul and Jane T. Michelson, 'Amintiri despre 'mini-revoluția culturală' din România', in *Analele Sighet, 9, Anii 1961-1972: Țările Europei de Est între speranțele reformei și realitatea stagnării* (Bucharest: Fundația Academia Civică, 2001), 865.

¹⁰¹ *Ibid.*

¹⁰² Monica Lovinescu, *Unde scurte, Jurnal indirect*, Vol. I (Bucharest: Humanitas, 1990), 473-474.

cancelled in the period of liberalisation), held at the Party Academy 'Ştefan Gheorghiu', were re-introduced.¹⁰³ The 'July Theses' had of course long-term consequences as well. They led to the reinforcement of Marxism-Leninism within the curricula of the Philosophy Departments and, in 1977, to the dismantling and the merging of Sociology with Philosophy Departments.¹⁰⁴ They facilitated the apparition of 'Song to Romania, *Daciada*, the Homage volumes published on every 7th and 26th of January, the daily two-hour television, the forced meetings at Neptun, protochronism and its results.'¹⁰⁵

2.2.2. *The Impact of the July Theses in the Romanian Artists' Union*

The impact of the Theses on the Romanian Artists' Union can be assessed by the immediate measures taken by the Union's leadership in the very aftermath of the event. One could argue that the official response of the Union's leadership should not be regarded as expressing the individual opinion of each single member. Nevertheless, the 'success' of the July Theses' directions was evaluated in an Exposition delivered by Ceauşescu in November 1971, through simple statistical figures:

During this period debates, open meetings of Party organisations, broad plenary sessions in which participated activists from town, municipality and county committees have been taken place within the Party. Approximately 2.5 million Party members and working people participated in these meetings, 500.000 spoke publicly, thousands of proposals were made, some of them very valuable, all proving concern for the improvement of the general activity and especially of the educational dimension.

¹⁰³ Anneli Ute Gabanyi, *Literatura şi politica în România după 1945* (Bucharest: Editura Fundaţiei Culturale Române, 2001), 198.

¹⁰⁴ Katherine Verdery, *op. cit.*, 335.

¹⁰⁵ Romulus Rusan, 'Tezele şi reversul lor', in *Analele Sighet, 9, Anii 1961-1972: Țările Europei de Est între speranțele reformei și realitatea stagnării* (Bucharest: Fundația Academia Civică, 2001), 856.

The initiatives have been welcomed and approved enthusiastically by the entire Party and people. The debate of these measures received nationwide attention, it altered itself into a powerful manifestation of the Party's unity, of our entire people's determination to carry out firmly the internal and external communist policies.¹⁰⁶

Therefore, even circumstantial or partially approving declarations were regarded by those in power as a complete success.

The meeting of the Union's operative leadership after the event took place on July 12.¹⁰⁷ Judging from the minutes of that meeting, it was a strictly organised and highly politicised meeting. Apart from the leadership of the Union (president, vice-presidents and secretaries), a propaganda instructor from the Party Committee, the sub-secretary of the Party organisation's Bureau within the UAP, as well as representatives of the Fine Arts Department within the State Committee for Culture and Art participated in the meeting.

The first set of measures that were adopted concerned the re-evaluation of personal exhibitions planned for the next few months. A commission composed of three members was established in order to visit the studios of the artists who were going to expose and to decide upon the suitability of the works prepared for the exhibitions. The main criterion on the grounds of which the works of art were to be evaluated was the thematic orientation according to the Marxist-Leninist philosophy. In the case of a negative verdict, the personal exhibitions were replaced by group exhibitions – composed of appropriate exhibits - or by decorative art exhibitions, considered to be the most neutral exhibitions. Special attention was paid to the gallery 'Apollo' which had gained in the previous years the fame of being the place where the most innovative works were displayed. One of the vice-presidents of the Union was entrusted with the mission of supervising the exhibitions there. As

¹⁰⁶ Nicolae Ceaușescu, *Exposition concerning the Program of the RCP, for the Improvement of Ideological Activity...*, 24-25.

¹⁰⁷ ASB, fond 2239, UAP, File 17/1971, *Minutes of the Meeting of the Operative Leadership of the Romanian Artists' Union*, July 12, 1971.

far as the republican exhibitions were concerned, the Union adopted a wait-and-see tactic. Evidently unprepared for such strict demands and wanting to avoid any possible negative reactions on behalf of the Party propaganda activists, the Union's leadership came up with the proposal to organise for the regular autumn Salon a decorative art exhibition displaying works of art dedicated to the working people. By contrast, the agenda of exhibitions for the year 1972 was filled with thematic exhibitions: for example an exhibition devoted to the anniversary of ten years from the completion of collectivisation, an exhibition devoted to the semi-centenary of the Union of the Communist Youth or an exhibition entitled 'Bucharest - Socialist City'. As far as the exhibitions abroad were concerned, tight measures were imposed: no single exhibition would be organised abroad without the direct accord of the State Committee for Culture and Art. In addition, only figurative, thematic works would be selected for these exhibitions.

A second corpus of measures was settled in order to pinpoint the newly required ideological activity inside the Romanian Artists' Union. The first step taken was to put the entire ideological and educational activity under the direct supervision of the Academy of Economic, Political and Social Studies, which would help Union members to understand better the 'Marxist-Leninist philosophical notions concerning the art creation process'.¹⁰⁸ This became in the following years the most important practice in order to diminish the authority of established unions and research institutions. The most intrusive process took place within the field of historiography - where the famous Institute of History was put under the tutelage of the Institute of the Party History - but it encompassed gradually all humanist disciplines.¹⁰⁹ This meant a permanent, arbitrary intrusion in any field considered

¹⁰⁸ Ibid, 37.

¹⁰⁹ 'It is not the case to insist here. But it should be underlined this systematical doubling of institutions, which intended to transfer the symbolic prestige and, even more, the initiatives from the Romanian Academy to the Academy of Social and Political Sciences or to the 'Stefan Gheorghiu' Academy, from the various professional institutes to the Institute of the Party History', Alexandru Zub, *Orizontul inchis - Istoriografia romana sub comunism* (Iasi: Institutul European, 2000). For the same phenomenon, this time in the field of philosophy and sociology, see Vladimir Tismaneanu, 'Academia 'Stefan Gheorghiu' si formele coruptiei ideologice', in *Arheologia terorii* (Bucuresti: Ed. Eminescu, 1992).

ideologically significant, intrusion which led to the alteration of accent from internal, professional activities to highly politicised ones.

The leadership of the Romanian Artists' Union was urged to reconsider - under the guidance of the above-mentioned Academy of Economic, Political and Social Studies - the materials which were going to be published in *Arta* review, the official publication of the UAP. The demanded intervention in the review aimed at touching both the content and the form. The painstaking balance obtained during the previous years between materials attempting to update the artistic achievements in the West and those describing the Romanian developments in the field of fine arts was practically destroyed. The review was dedicated exclusively to autochthonous art with a special emphasis on that depicting the socialist reality. Furthermore, the language used in this review was considered much too hermetic in order to reach the working class. The art historians and critics were advised to employ 'non-sophisticated' utterances that would educate people in the spirit of love for national art and past.¹¹⁰

In addition to this, artists were obliged to participate in summer camps and study trips to be held in agricultural cooperatives or industrial plants.¹¹¹ The practice was not entirely new, but never before were artists asked to provide evidence of their productive stays there. First of all, they had to have a written certificate, issued by the Party secretary of that specific institution, proving that they spent the entire period there. Secondly, at the time of their return, they were asked to put on display,

¹¹⁰ In a following meeting of the Executive Bureau (November 7, 1972), where the situation of *Arta* review was again discussed, the issue of accessible language was again brought into discussion: 'Very serious criticism was leveled against the language in which the review is written. Indeed, the language can be simplified, so that a clearer and more accessible way of rendering things exists. We must understand that the review addresses not only to a restricted number of specialists, but also to a large public. Therefore, a clearer, unambiguous form of wording is recommended, a form which is easily accessible to non-professionals.' (Mircea Popescu, ASB, *fond* 2239, UAP, File 19/1971, 17).

¹¹¹ This resembles very well Mao's directive from December 1968 that stated that educated young people should go to the countryside in order to be re-educated by the poor and lower-middle peasants. See for this Stuart Schram, *The Thought of Mao Tse-Tung* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1989), 178.

within internal Artists' Union exhibitions, a certain number of works depicting the new Socialist environment.

The meeting ended with the elaboration of a letter of support which was going to be sent to the General Secretary Office, namely to Nicolae Ceaușescu. The Romanian Artists' Union, in the name of the entire artistic community, expressed its 'total endorsement of the proposed measures for the strengthening of the Party spirit and revolutionary commitment in the political, ideological and educational activity'.¹¹² The typed version of the letter found in the UAP collection within the State Archive in Bucharest has various corrections and added words in pen. The corrections attempted to induce a more vehement tone, to emphasise the commitment of the artists to the putting into practice of the Theses. For instance, the phrase 'we shall analyse our work in the light of the proposed measures' was replaced with the more powerful 'we shall do everything to implement the measures'. The words 'beloved Comrade Ceaușescu' were added wherever the text allowed the insertion of this formula in order to underline both the authorship of the measures and the commitment of the artists towards their initiator.

In the months that followed this first meeting, new measures were adopted by the UAP. Within a 'propaganda plan', artists were scheduled to accompany propagandists in plants, schools, universities and to show and speak about their works which presumably envisaged the socialist achievements.¹¹³ They were also requested to choose one day per week during an exhibition period when they were supposed to respond to the public's questions.¹¹⁴ Art critics were also invited to these discussions. In addition to this measure and to complying with the strict directives received from the newly created Council of Socialist Culture and Education, the juries of State exhibitions also had to include representatives of the

¹¹² ASB, fond 2239, UAP, File 17/1971, *Minutes of the Meeting of the Operative Leadership of the Romanian Artists' Union*, July 22, 1971, 32.

¹¹³ ASB, fond 2239, UAP, File 14/1971, *Minutes of the Meeting of the Operative Leadership of the Romanian Artists' Union*, October 4, 1971, 3.

¹¹⁴ Ibid

working class.¹¹⁵ The assembling of a corpus of images for propaganda purposes was also required by the Council of Socialist Culture and Education. On the agenda of the UAP, three important points were added: the elaboration of internal rules within the UAP, the modification of the UAP's Statute and the elaboration of a corpus of Theses for the next UAP's national conference. All these point to the amplitude of the phenomenon that aimed to re-shape practically the base of artistic creation in Communist Romania.

Judged from the rapid acceptance of the Theses, from the apparently unanimous commitment of the UAP's leadership to Ceaușescu's initiatives, it could be inferred that the Theses achieved their objective. Within the mass-media no prompt, individual reactions of artists were registered either. Unlike the situation within the Writers' Union, where internal debates and initial resistance to the implementation of the Theses took place, the Artists' Union seems to have reacted exactly how the Party leadership had expected.¹¹⁶ It was probably the proverbial lack of cohesion within the artistic community which hindered a united reaction. Or perhaps the usual reluctance of the artists to participate in the internal meetings of the UAP. What one may conclude from the lists of participants at the meetings, in the immediate aftermath of the July moment, is that, more or less, the same persons attended the respective gatherings. They were members of the leadership, persons who would not risk their positions/advantages by challenging the Theses' statements. They simply accepted, point by point, all the Party's requirements. They even forced themselves to seem enthusiastic as the corrections in the letter of approval addressed to Ceaușescu tend to indicate. If one takes into consideration these initial facts one may affirm that the July Theses achieved their purpose within the Romanian Artists' Union. Furthermore, Ceaușescu's representations in painting and sculpture started to be widely circulated in the media after that very moment which again illustrates that the July Theses represented a turning point in the

¹¹⁵ ASB, fond 2239, UAP, File 14/1971, *Minutes of the Meeting of the Operative Leadership of the Romanian Artists' Union*, November 11, 1971, 24.

¹¹⁶ For reactions within the Writers' Union see Monica Lovinescu, *Unde scurte*, Vol. II (Bucharest: Humanitas, 1990), 512-515 and Eugen Negrici, *Literature and Propaganda in Communist Romania* (Bucharest: The Romanian Cultural Foundation Publishing House, 1999), 81-82.

cultural and ideological policy of the communist Romania and the cult of the leader himself. This image of total success is somewhat diminished by what happened in the following years. It is true that Ceaușescu's cult started to develop vigorously after the issue of the July Theses, but the focus of the cult, as we have seen in the first chapter, was not the painting but the mass demonstrations, the stadiums overfilled with people who marched, danced, sang and praised the leader. By contrast, the professionals' production was a limited contribution towards Ceaușescu's extolling. The creation in 1975 of the national festival 'Song to Romania', at Ceaușescu's direct initiative, was in fact the 'official' moment when professional artists were deprived of their symbolic status as main producers of art works. The festival practically allowed a large number of amateurs to compete for a moment of fame, usually achieved by praising Ceaușescu, the Romanian glorious past or the great accomplishments of the socialist period. From this perspective, the July Theses did not entirely achieve their purpose within the UAP. Probably the artists did not fully accomplish the imposed tasks since they had to be replaced by non-professionals. To conclude, the July Theses represented the beginning of massive ideological intrusion in the field of art creation and of personal and arbitrary decisions in the sphere of cultural policy-making, ultimately resulting in the emergence of Ceaușescu's cult. Though the July Theses did not lead to the expected outcome in terms of concrete artistic production within the UAP, they nonetheless heavily impinged upon the artistic life in communist Romania.

What followed after the implementation of the July Theses were variations on the same theme. The formation of the new man remained a constant and the accent put on the educational and mobilisational purpose of arts a recurrent theme in Ceaușescu's speeches. Equally important was the theme of national art with its appendix, the historical painting. The year 1974 marked a definitive victory for the history-oriented nationalism promoted by the Ceaușescu regime. Firstly, the XIth Congress of the Romanian Communist Party unequivocally stated, through the voice of its general secretary, the importance history had in the configuration of the Party's ideology. Ceaușescu began his speech at the Congress with an eighteen page

introduction, a summary of the national history from the ancient times to the communist period that was to become the guiding theoretical piece for the field of historiography.¹¹⁷ Furthermore, the President's speech explicitly affirmed that should be eradicated 'the anarchic, petit-bourgeois mentality [according to which] the problems of history, of the different social sciences are only problems of specialty. They are problems of the communist theory and ideology.'¹¹⁸ Secondly, the year 1974 witnessed the emergence of the protochronist theory which led to an exaltation of national values and achievements and to a hyperbolic projection of Romania's greatness in the cultural field.¹¹⁹ The repercussions of these shifts/accents were immense. A massive orientation towards the past, towards the interpretation of history from the perspective of the communist period and an attempt to discover Romanian firsts in different fields became the main preoccupation of the men of culture and of the party ideologues as well.¹²⁰

The subsequent Congresses, Conferences, meetings reiterated the same themes. The peaks were the first Congress for Socialist Culture and Education in 1976 which imposed the motif of the 'national epic' and urged artists to create works of art that would narrate the glorious past of the Romanian people and the 1983 Working Meeting on Organisational and Politico-Educative Problems that would readdress the same old points enounced in the July Theses. The 1983 Meeting was initiated by Ceaușescu without previous preparation and took place at a holiday resort on the Black Sea shore. In this sense it resembles very much the way the July Theses had

¹¹⁷ Katherine Verdery, *National Ideology under Socialism, Identity and Cultural Politics in Ceaușescu's Romania* (Berkeley, Los Angeles, London: University of California Press, 1991), 221 and Vlad Georgescu, 'Politics, History and Nationalism: The Origins of Romania's Socialist Personality Cult', in Joseph Held (ed.), *The Cult of Power, Dictators in the Twentieth Century* (New York: East European Monographs, 1983), 137.

¹¹⁸ Nicolae Ceaușescu, *Cuvîntare la Congresul al XI-lea al Partidului Comunist Român* (București: Ed. Politică, 1975), 76.

¹¹⁹ Katherine Verdery, *op. cit.*, 167-214.

¹²⁰ This State policy was affirmed as such also in documents published abroad: 'One of the main aims of State cultural policy at present is to enhance the value of the nation's cultural heritage. Throughout the centuries individuals have produced works that were in the main currents of European culture – classicism, pre-romanticism, critical realism, symbolism and modernism – in short, all the literary and artistic movements which have marked the evolution of other cultures; in Romania, however, these have assumed an original and sometimes syncretic form, and have been ahead of their time.', Ion Dodu Bălan, *Cultural Policy in Romania* (Paris: The Unesco Press, 1975), 14.

been launched and proves once again Ceaușescu's personal and arbitrary intervention in cultural/ideological issues. Ceaușescu restated the need that Romanians be educated in 'the patriotic spirit of love towards the glorious fighting past of our people', that 'the hundreds of thousands of cultural-artistic units ... starting from the National Theatre and the Romanian Opera to the last cultural house in the most remote village ... become centres of revolutionary, patriotic education, of formation of the new man'.¹²¹ Furthermore, he picked up the theme of the 'positive hero' and advised artists to beautify reality if that was necessary in order to achieve a character able to be a model for the younger generations.¹²²

His rhetoric remained unchanged, and its belief in the formation of the new man through mass mobilisation means unbent. As late as October 1989, Ceaușescu stated:

We need a more combative literature, animated by a highly revolutionary and patriotic spirit, inspired from the realities of our motherland [...] We need more combative prose and poetry, revolutionary spirit that will galvanise the activity of the working people, of the youth of our motherland, [we need] combative music, with patriotic and revolutionary spirit, better movies, better theatre.¹²³

¹²¹ Nicolae Ceaușescu, 'Cuvântarea tovarășului Nicolae Ceaușescu la Consfătuirea de lucru pe problemele muncii organizatorice și politico-educative', *Scînteia*, August 5, 1983.

¹²² Ibid. See also Monica Lovinescu, *Seismografe, Unde scurte*, Vol. III (București: Humanitas, 1994), 64.

¹²³ Nicolae Ceaușescu, *Expunere cu privire la problemele socialismului, ale activității ideologice, politico-educative, de dezvoltare a conștiinței revoluționare, de formare a omului nou, constructor conștient al socialismului și comunismului în România*, prezentată la Plenara lărgită a Comitetului Central al Partidului Comunist Român, 24 October 1989 (Bucharest: Ed. Politică, 1989), 48-49.

3. The Institutions and Mechanisms of Cult Production: the Role of the Romanian Artists' Union

The creation of the Ceaușescu cult in the field of visual arts cannot be understood without analysing the mechanisms of visual cult production and the institutions involved in this process. The visual representation of Ceaușescu was not a malign, isolated excrescence on the body of the Romanian art during the 1970s and the 1980s. Rather, it was a phenomenon that fitted in with the general cultural and ideological development that emerged out of the tacit alliance between the Romanian leadership and the artistic community, an alliance that, though marked by an alternation between mild and tense periods, was always one of 'closeness' and mutual interests. The Romanian leadership needed artists because artists could provide a visual and easily readable medium through which best to convey Party ideology. Artists' work was easy to circulate and display at various locations, and its message could be grasped in a matter of minutes. Artists, on the other hand, desired social status and the material advantages that came with it. In taking advantage of this perennial weakness of Romanian intellectuals, political power learned how to approach them and how to force them to accept the rules of the game. And in recompense for their endorsement, intellectuals gained social visibility, which was subsequently equated with (controlled) power and access to material resources.

There has been much discussion on the role played by intellectuals in communist Romania and the causes behind their collaboration with the regime. The first possible cause is the traditionally deep mixture of political power and intellectuals. On many occasions intellectuals have played prominent roles in the political life of the country, or at least occupied positions very close to those in power, by assuming

the roles of official or unofficial advisers.¹ In the interwar period in particular, they engaged in vivid debates on traditionalism and modernism, and echoed and supported different political orientations.² This proximity to political power made Romanian intellectuals more inclined than their Western counterparts to enter into dialogue with political power and accept its inherent dark side. The resulting profile of the Romanian intellectual was not very flattering and was mainly based its negative aspects, such as the intellectual's support for political power, submissiveness and a compromising nature. Whilst Western intellectuals were often portrayed as critics of the societies they lived in, their Eastern colleagues – Romanians included – were seen as passive proponents of those in power, something for which they were usually rewarded. A second set of explanations range from the 'traditional passivity, typical of peasant societies' to 'a sense of mystic existentialism and political inactivity',³ whilst more sophisticated explanations draw on the Orthodox religion with 'its traditional deference toward political authority and [...] the church ritual calling for externalisation rather than internalisation of values'.⁴ Finally, there is 'the tradition of dissimulation' that is 'connected with both church ritual and the left-over imprints of an Oriental mentality not unknown for its ability to corrupt intellectuals by offering access to some of the material privileges enjoyed by the powers-that-be'.⁵ For all these reasons, Romanian intellectuals were generally passive and supportive towards political power. An example of this is given by the moment of 'guided

¹ Katherine Verdery, *National Ideology Under Socialism, Identity and Cultural Politics in Ceaușescu's Romania* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1991).

² Irina Culic, 'The Strategies of Intellectuals: Romania under Communist Rule in Comparative Perspective', in András Bozóki (ed.), *Intellectuals and Politics in Central Europe* (Budapest: Central European University Press, 1999). See also Andrei Marga, 'Cultural and Political Trends in Romania Before and After 1989', *East European Politics and Societies*, Vol. 7, No. 1, Winter 1993, 14-32 and Alina Mungiu-Pippidi, 'Romanian Political Intellectuals before and after the Revolution', in András Bozóki (ed.), *Intellectuals and Politics in Central Europe* (Budapest: Central European University Press, 1999).

³ Michael Shafir, *Political Culture, Intellectual Dissent and Intellectual Consent. The Case of Romania* (Jerusalem: The Hebrew University of Jerusalem, The Soviet and East European Research Centre, 1978), 27; Dennis Deletant, 'Literature and Society in Romania since 1948', in Geoffrey A. Hosking and George F. Cushing (eds.), *Perspectives on Literature and Society in Eastern and Western Europe* (London: Macmillan Press, 1989), 123; Doina and Nicolae Harsanyi, 'Romania: Democracy and the Intellectuals', *East European Quarterly*, XXVII, No.2, June 1993.

⁴ Michael Shafir, *op. cit.*, 27

⁵ *Ibid.*

liberalization', which – unlike the similar processes in Poland, Hungary and Czechoslovakia – was caused by external rather than internal factors (the conflict with the Soviet Union). This was not initiated by 'intellectuals "from below"', but by the Party "from above". Furthermore, 'the Rumanian intellectuals responded to it; rather than winning concessions, they were benignly awarded a very definite measure of increased freedom.'⁶

In this chapter we will address two issues. Firstly, we will discuss the relationship between Romanian artists and the Ceaușescu leadership: namely, we will try to identify the artists' response to the regime's attempts to win them over to its side. Secondly, we will investigate the main tools and mechanisms used by the Uniunea Artiștilor Plastici/Romanian Artists' Union (UAP) to mould the production of art according to State cultural policy. By investigating both these issues we will be moving a step further towards understanding the mechanisms of visual culture production in Romania as well as the involvement of the artists in this process. Most of these mechanisms were similar to those already used by other cultural institutions, though some were specific to the UAP. The period chosen for investigation in this chapter is the late 1960s and early 1970s. This was not a deliberate choice, but one conditioned by the current state of the Romanian archives (the materials relating to the 1980s are, in practice, unavailable to researchers). This period is anyway most likely to be the most interesting and rich in terms of debate, encompassing both the period of liberalisation (at the end of the 1960s) and the period during which most of the anti-intellectual measures were taken (the beginning of the 1970s).

3.1. The Romanian Artists' Union: an Ideological Organisation or a Professional Trade-Union?

The Romanian Artists' Union was established in 1950. Like many other institutions of the time, it was an import, and its structure and purpose were modelled on pre-

⁶ Ibid, 31.

existing institutions in the Soviet Union. Although the UAP was officially declared 'a new and superior organisational form for the realisation of the unity of conception and method among the artists of all generations and nationalities',⁷ over time it took on an increasingly constraining role. Its main purposes were controlling the mass of artists and disseminating Party instructions and supervising their implementation – that is to say, in a sense playing a mediating role between the Party and the artists.

A comparison of the Statute of the UAP before the period we look at (i.e. before 1965, the year Nicolae Ceaușescu came to power) and the Statute drawn up in the aftermath of the UAP National Conference in 1968 offers an interesting insight into the changes that took place in the intervening years. For instance, in the pre-1965 variant, the role of the Union is defined as follows:

The UAP promotes that art which contributes through the ideas embedded in it and through its high artistic value to the struggle of our people for the construction of socialism, peace and social progress in the world.

The UAP promotes socialist realism as a method of artistic creation, the employment and development of the best traditions of Romanian art as well as the realist and progressive traditions of the universal, classical and contemporary art. It supports multilateral manifestations of the artists' creative initiative, as well as the development of artistic individualities such as different styles and artistic techniques.⁸

Although the post-1968 Statute mentions roughly the same points, there are some significant differences in the way they are inserted in the text as well as a few omissions. For example, there is no mention in the opening sentence of the first article of the Statute of the word 'art' (or any related term). Instead we are told of the military-like role assigned to the Union, which is called on to 'participate in the struggle of our entire people for the construction of a multilaterally developed

⁷ 'Les Arts Plastiques dans la Republique Populaire Roumaine, București, E.S.P.L.A., 1961', 5-7, cited in Magda Cârnci, *Artele plastice în România 1945-1989* (București: Meridiane, 2000), 20.

⁸ ASB, *fond* 2239, UAP, File 110/1970, 7.

socialist society'.⁹ The army-like structure of the UAP is reinforced in the following sentence with the words: '...through the artistic creation of its members, [the UAP] militates for the putting into practice of the Party's and the State's cultural policy by the integration of Romanian contemporary art into the process of developing our system, by the creation of the new man'.¹⁰ Two ideas are worth noting here: firstly, the openly declared militant nature of art production at the time; and secondly, the role assigned to the UAP as an institution that simply and obediently implements the cultural policy established by State and Party. The second part of the paragraph reads:

The UAP promotes an art based on the principles of socialist humanism, linked indestructibly with the life and aspirations of the Romanian people, with the accomplishments of the contemporary epoch, an art which stimulates the organic connection between the vibrant kernel of our cultural tradition and the innovative spirit, which contributes to the development of talent and the affirmation of values.¹¹

Besides the replacement of the notion of socialist realism with that of socialist humanism (this change was in fact part of the general process of dissociation from the previous regime and the strict method of socialist realism it promoted), there is also a lack of any reference to Western art as a source of inspiration. Emphasis is instead placed on the promotion of an art inspired by contemporary realities and achievements. The more sophisticated construction through which traditional culture is brought into the foreground ('... the organic connection between the vibrant kernel of our cultural tradition...') indicates a greater emphasis on the promotion of the folk culture. Finally, in the second version of the UAP Statute, terms such as 'artist', 'individuality' or 'creative initiative' make no appearance at all.

⁹ Ibid, 17.

¹⁰ Ibid.

¹¹ Ibid.

From the above quotations, the role of the Union as an institution whose aim was the 'ideological and aesthetic development of the problems of culture and art' is clear.¹² Equally clear is the emphasis placed on supporting further development of the Romanian tradition and bridging the gap created during the internationalist, Soviet-oriented period. This final point was stated clearly by speakers at the Third National UAP Conference in 1968:

The fundamental purpose of our Union is to assure the continuation and consolidation of the Romanian art school, and its main task is to provide moral and material support to all creative energies.¹³

After the launch of the July Theses, the UAP's Statute was revised anew. Curiously, the internal debates that took place ahead of the newly revised Statute were focused on reinforcing the creative role of the Union. This preoccupation of the Union leadership is all the more bizarre as it comes *after* the launch of the Theses and *after* their official acceptance.¹⁴ During the period of relative liberalisation and calm relationships with the Party leadership, the artists presumably had not felt the need to have their creative independence stated in their Statute. Once this had been attacked so brutally by the Ceaușescu leadership, however, they rushed to have it put it down in written form. Needless to say, their formulations did not appear in the final document. It is telling, nonetheless, that they tried to stress their role as the only existing body of specialists, in the vain hope that a written Statute would defend their rights, role and status against the role newly assigned to them. At a meeting of the Executive Bureau, a few months after the launch of the July Theses, the artists debated their role within the new political context. Patriciu Mateescu, the secretary of the UAP, proposed that it be stated in the Statute that the Union was 'the only existing body of specialists and that it is responsible for its activity'.¹⁵ The

¹² ASB, *fond* 2239, UAP, File 14/1968, *The Third National Conference of the RAU*, 17-19 April 1968, 16.

¹³ *Ibid.*, 224.

¹⁴ See chapter 2 for a discussion on the acceptance of the July Theses by the UAP.

¹⁵ ASB, *fond* 2239, UAP, File 19/1971-1972, *Minutes of the Meeting of the Executive Bureau*, 25 April 1972, 81.

president of the Union, Brăduț Covaliu, said, 'the Statute is made by artists and for artists and the leadership of the Union is responsible for its decisions to the Union members'.¹⁶ Anatol Mândrescu, vice-president of the Union, wanted to reduce the intrusion of ideological factors by stressing that 'creation is the main factor' within the Union, that greater emphasis should be placed on creation as the most important activity of Union members.¹⁷ Mândrescu also wanted the relationship between the UAP and the other cultural institutions to be renegotiated such that the Union would become more active, would contribute to 'the further development of the cultural policy of our country'.¹⁸

On this occasion, the discrepancies between the daily realities and the loudly proclaimed goals of the Union were also revealed publicly (i.e. beyond the closed doors of the Union's internal meetings). As was often mentioned during the Conference, the Union acted more as a launch pad for a privileged few who totally obeyed Party directives in order to hold on to their privileges, whilst paying little attention to the Union members outside this inner circle:

It is obvious that it [the UAP] cannot only be an organisation of mutual professional assistance, whose purposes and actions are limited to ourselves, even less an institution that launches certain privileged persons into spectacular careers, using unclear criteria.¹⁹

To conclude this section, the Romanian Artists' Union was a transmission-belt for the main ideological directives drawn up by the Party. Its main role was to circulate Party directives among the mass of artists and to supervise their implementation. Moreover, the UAP became a launch pad for a privileged few who were usually members of the leadership or well-connected to the power structure and enjoyed access to the limited resources made available by the Party.

¹⁶ Ibid.

¹⁷ Ibid.

¹⁸ Ibid.

¹⁹ Ibid, 135.

3.2. *The Beneficiaries – the People's Voice*

Another particularly important issue was the relationship between those who commissioned works of art and the artists themselves. The artists employed the word 'beneficiary/ies' to designate those who commissioned and bought their art production. As far as we can tell from the archival material investigated, during internal debates the Romanian artists never used the term that gained currency in the USSR. 'patron/s'. We consider this linguistic demarcation very important for at least two reasons. Firstly, on a rhetorical level, the use of 'beneficiary/ies' instead of 'patron/s' could, knowing that the same term was used to designate 'the people' as the main beneficiary of the works of art, imply a diminution of the role played by the commissioners. Indeed, commissioners would hide behind the faceless 'working masses' in order to reinforce the idea that the criteria used in acquiring works of art were 'designed' by the masses themselves. During the UAP internal meeting on 21 August 1970, at which the programme for the anniversary exhibition entitled '50 Years from the Foundation of the PCR' was discussed, Anastase Anastasiu, the representative of the State Committee for Culture and Art, said:

The State Committee for Culture and Art is the supporter of bold ideas, but our people should understand what artists think, [the people should] understand their [the artists'] love and devotion towards the Party.²⁰

The ambiguity the use of this term implies is highly indicative of the diluted, amorphous character of the institutions that played the traditional role of the commissioners.

Secondly, unlike the situation in the Soviet Union, where the use of the 'patron-client' relationship to describe the link between commissioners and artists implied a more personal connection, the choice of words in Romania suggests a colder, more impersonal relationship. This does not mean that the phenomenon described as

²⁰ ASB, *fond* 2239, UAP, File 17/1968-1971, *Minutes of the Plenary Meeting of the Painting Section*, 21 August 1970, 71.

patronage by scholars investigating the said relationship in the Soviet cultural world did not exist in Romania.²¹ As in every society where resources are scarce, a patron-client system also existed in Romania – in fact, it was actually almost impossible to survive outside it, and it required individual skills, connections and moral values to carve out a position within the system. What we are suggesting, however, is that the Party used this terminological ambiguity in order to justify its demands: to condemn – on behalf of the people – artists who did not produce ideologically correct works of art and to provide a more solid justification for its actions. For instance, at the 1978 National Conference of the UAP, Nicolae Ceaușescu used this link in order to demand that more works of art adhere to the correct ideological line:

I do not want anyone to understand that we want to limit somehow the liberty of creation. Each of you is free to create whatever he or she likes. But, as I have said before, and I wish to repeat here clearly, we have certain requirements as far as thematic content and the artistic quality are concerned. Being, in the name of the people, the beneficiaries of these works of art, we demand that these meet as closely as possible the criteria I have referred to.²²

But behind this mixed declaration, it was the Party that controlled all art production. The main mechanism of control was the allocation of funds for the production of works in accordance with Party requirements. This material monopoly held by the Party, as well as the ideological demands it imposed on the artists, made for a very tense relationship between Party and artists.²³ The Party exercised its monopoly through a limited number of institutions that commissioned, supervised and

²¹ John P. Willerton, *Patronage and Politics in the USSR* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1992). For a description of patron-client relationship in the cultural world see the classic study by Sheila Fitzpatrick, 'Intelligentsia and Power, Client-Patron Relations in Stalin's Russia', in Manfred Hildermeier and Elisabeth Müller-Luckner (eds.), *Stalinism before the Second World War, New Avenues of Research* (München: R. Oldenbourg Verlag, 1998) as well as *Everyday Stalinism, Ordinary Life in Extraordinary Times: Soviet Russia in the 1930s* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1999), 95-114.

²² Nicolae Ceaușescu, *Cuvîntare la Conferința națională a Uniunii Artiștilor Plastici*, 22 June 1978 (București: Ed. Politică, 1978), 5.

²³ The internal private market was very small. In 1967, for example, only 47 works were sold to private persons., ASB, fond 2239, UAP, File 17/1968, *Minutes of the Plenary Meeting of the Painting Section*, 25 June 1968, 13.

purchased only those works of art that conformed to the officially accepted aesthetic model. At the very beginning, only the Ministry of Culture, through the *Comitetul de Stat pentru Cultură și Artă* (CSCA)/The State Committee for Culture and Art, was supposed to commission art works. After an increase in funds for acquisitions following the 1968 Artists' National Conference, however, three more organisations received funds for acquisitions and the right to act as commissioners. These were the *Uniunea Generală a Sindicatelor din România* (UGSR)/The National Trade Union, *Uniunea Tineretului Comunist* (UTC)/The Communist Youth Union and *Gospodăria de Partid* (GP).²⁴ The situation was further complicated by the gradual delimitation of the UAP leadership into a distinct body between the Party/cultural organisations and the mass of artists. In being that body which received and distributed funds within the UAP, the Union leadership in effect became a new centre of power that reproduced the scheme already existing at higher levels. Between the leadership and the rest of the Union, a well established system of relationships, interests, mutual support developed that left little room for newcomers.

The archival materials suggest that the issue that impinged most on the relationship between the Union and beneficiaries seems to have been the unfair allocation of commissions. At internal UAP meetings, rank-and-file members of the Union began to raise their voices against the establishment of preferential networks of artists, who received commissions on a near continual basis, while others had to write individual applications for a project to be assigned to them.²⁵ For example, during a meeting of the Painting Section, Marius Cilievici, an artist who at the time was a member of the Monumental Art Commission and in charge of acquisitions, said:

²⁴ See page 20, note 50.

²⁵ For example, the File 24/1968-1971 contains hundreds of applications for commissions for monumental art. All are very stereotyped and mention the fact that the applicant had not had a work commissioned in months: 'Șerban Iepure, painter, member of the RAU, kindly asks for a work of monumental art to be commissioned as this year he did not have any work assigned.' (28 August 1970), ASB, *fond* 2239, UAP, File 24/1968-1971, 29.

The beneficiaries are omnipotent; they decide who they want for certain commissions. Some artists receive up to five contracts for monumental art per year. It is not possible for one artist to work on three commissioned works: he is probably working with 'negroes', whom he pays very little; these works should have been allocated to artists equally able to do them but with no assignments.²⁶

One additional factor that affected the relationship between the UAP and the beneficiaries was the well-known sufficiency of ideological activists, who refused any form of advice on matters they were clearly not trained to deal with. As a consequence, the Union leadership tried to impose groups of two or three specialists who were to act as advisers to the activists in charge of acquisitions. The solution seemed not to provide the desired results as the suggestions of the specialists were usually ignored:

You should know that the leadership of our Union has thought this through and decided to create advice-giving groups of specialists for each beneficiary [...] to support them in the undertaking of buying your works. We established these groups [...] but they did not work at all because the beneficiaries would not accept any form of advice: they bought only what they liked or was convenient for them.²⁷

At another Union meeting, the almost 'dictatorial' practices the beneficiaries employed are described. Not only were the activists within the commissioning bodies totally unqualified to judge the value of a work of art, but the Union

²⁶ ASB, *fond* 2239, UAP, File 17/1968, *Minutes of the Painting Section's Bureau Meeting*, 13 October 1969, 50.

The situation described above is strikingly similar to that existing in the Soviet Writers' Union: 'Some Union leaders completely ceased to do any work themselves, but instead put their names to the product executed by hired personnel, whose payment they determined themselves, keeping it to an absolute minimum.... the whole atmosphere in the Union was more appropriate to a capitalist rather than socialist society, as leaders of the Union were often called 'bosses', whereas the artists they hired were referred to as 'negroes'.'. Vera Tolz, 'Cultural Bosses' as Patrons and Clients: the Functioning of the Soviet Creative Unions in the Postwar Period', *Contemporary European History*, Vol. 2, No. 1, 2002, 101.

²⁷ ASB, *fond* 2239, UAP, File 9/1970, *Minutes of the Plenary Meeting of the Painting Section*, 8 July 1970, 90.

leadership seemed inclined to resign itself to this situation and advise other members of the Union to do the same. An illustration of the leadership's acquiescence regarding the personal acquisition criteria of the beneficiaries is the final section of a very telling dialogue between the artist Nicogosian and the president of the UAP, Brăduț Covaliu:

Comrade Brăduț Covaliu: The problem is that the works proposed for acquisition [by the Commission for Acquisition] are held at the headquarters of the UGSR and then Comrade Dănalache [the person responsible for acquisitions on behalf of the UGSR] comes and says: 'I like this one, I don't like that ...'

Comrade Nicogosian: 'But Comrade Dănalache is no good *at all* in this [art]! What else can we expect of him?'

Comrade Brăduț Covaliu: Comrade Nicogosian, we have only one choice: to produce works that can convince the UGSR. If we don't feel comfortable with this, we should stop complying.²⁸

When it came to staging a homage exhibition dedicated to the presidential couple, the representatives of the commissioning organisations employed even more drastic measures to make sure the artists produced what was required of them. An unnamed art critic questioned by a Radio Free Europe journalist about the apparent 'competition' between artists to produce works depicting the Ceaușescus offered the following description of the process:

Tamara Dobrin²⁹ summons the artists, announces the opening of a homage exhibition and asks them to come up with sketches of future works in the shortest possible time. Any hesitation, any attempt to refuse – no matter how gently – is met with the following curt reply [from Tamara Dobrin]:

²⁸ ASB, *fond 2239*, UAP, File 9/1970, *Minutes of the Plenary Meeting of the Painting Section*, 8 June 1970, 34.

²⁹ Director of the Council of Socialist Culture and Education.

'Comrade, sign this declaration that you have refused a commission from the Council of Socialist Culture and Education.'³⁰

Signing such a declaration would have constituted an openly political refusal to depict the presidential couple and would lead to an artist's joining a black list of politically 'unreliable' persons. Once on this list, an artist would have great difficulty in obtaining other commissions, regardless of the theme of the exhibition.

Additional misunderstandings and tensions between beneficiaries and artists were produced by the strict, often strange evaluation criteria stipulated by the acquisition norms and used by activists to ascribe value to works of art. As we have seen above, the activists who evaluated artists' works had next to no artistic training and were unable to attribute a fair value to a given work of art. Once selection had been made, the system of assigning a monetary value to a work of art had more to do with size, dimensions and the quantity/quality of the raw material used than any intrinsic, artistic qualities of the piece. The vice-president of the Union, Ion Frunzetti, spoke out against these criteria, which were both peculiar and outdated and allowed valuable exhibits to be ignored:

The acquisition price system is twenty years old. It was established using entirely arbitrary criteria; a very valuable sculpture of only 75 centimetres will never be recognised for its true value [...] A three and a half metre sculpture will always be more important than a 2.8 metre one.³¹

In addition, the general thematic framework the beneficiaries worked within was very strictly defined. For example, the norms of collaboration between the UGSR and the UAP regarding UGSR purchasing policy stated very clearly that the criteria to be used for acquisition were

³⁰ N. C. Munteanu, 'Arta plastică și cultul personalității', 29 January 1985, Open Society Archives, *fond* 300-60-1, Box 705.

³¹ ASB, *fond* 2239, UAP, File 11/1969, *Minutes of the Plenary Meeting of the Sculpture Section*, 19 December 1969, 25-26.

For the purpose of stimulating creation in the field of fine arts, for the adorning of the socio-cultural buildings of the trade-unions with paintings, sculptures, graphic works, decorative art and monumental art, [the UGSR uses its funds for works] inspired from the glorious fight past of our people, of our working class and of our Party, works reflecting the realities of today, the joy of accomplished duties, the achievements obtained in all spheres of our social life....³²

Sometimes the evaluators discarded works simply because they were unable to understand them. Too many straight lines in an industrial landscape could render a piece an 'Abstract' work, as one graphic artist recalled, when talking of what he considered sufficiently figurative to be accepted for the commemorative exhibition '25 Years from the Liberation':

I presented some sketches for an urban industrial landscape. I was rejected with the label 'Abstract', but there were only urban, technical elements, houses, blocks, industrial structures [...] All of them [were] very realistic representations.³³

Further practices hindered the establishment of a working relationship between the Union and the beneficiaries. For example, the beneficiaries' practice of establishing the rules of the game, even in terms of the procedure for signing contracts, was another factor that impeded the normal activity of the Union. In order for a contract to be signed, an artist had to present for evaluation a finished work, and not just a sketch or a plan. Once finished, the work entered the evaluation process, during which it passed through various commissions and finally, if approved, the long process of signing the contract would begin (a written request for the grant of that commission, the signing of the contract, the final evaluation of the work, payment). Consequently, there was always a risk that a finished work of art or one at an

³² ASB, *fond 2239*, UAP, File 46/1969-1971, *Norms of Collaboration in the field of Fine Arts between the National Trade Union and the Romanian Artists' Union*, 26 June 1969, 266.

³³ ASB, *fond 2239*, UAP, File 5/1969, *Minutes of the Plenary Meeting of the Graphics Section*, 16 January 1969, 64.

advanced stage of realisation would not be commissioned and the artist would be unable to recover the money invested in raw materials. This situation was brought up at a National Committee meeting by the graphic artist Cik Damadian:

All kind of absurd situations are appearing: for instance, in order for a graphic artist to get a contract signed, he first must do the work, finish it; not one contract is signed until after the work is finished. After that, the work has to be approved by all kinds of ideological commissions [...] And only then, when the work has been approved [...] can the artist make a written application to have the commission granted to him! [...] In other words, I have to finish a work to have it commissioned, to sign a contract.³⁴

Besides this unusual situation regarding the signing of the contracts, there was one other factor that made the relationship between artists and beneficiaries a particularly difficult one: the manner in which payment was made to the artists. The beneficiaries decided to effect payments for acquisitions on a once-a-year basis only. What could be an advantageous solution for a large, budgetary institution did not work in favour of the artists. In order to cope with this unusual practice, the artists, unable to support themselves financially, were constantly forced to take out loans from Union funds intended for art production and not for subsistence purposes:

The CSCA pays once a year. It is a very convenient method for them, but one which has serious repercussions for our work because our lending funds are not sufficient to cover members' needs. These lending funds were designed for creation itself and not to be the only source of existence.³⁵

This represented yet another method used to force artists with financial difficulties to take on commissions of all kinds. By maintaining this state of permanent

³⁴ ASB, *fond* 2239, UAP, File 1/1970, *Minutes of the National Committee Meeting*, 18-19 February 1970, 98.

³⁵ ASB, *fond* 2239, UAP, File 13/1970, *Minutes of the Plenary Meeting of the Sculpture Section*, 12 June 1970, 14.

financial insecurity, the official institutions formed a pool of artists, potential clientele, who agreed to make works of art for official exhibitions or portraits of the presidential couple.

A separate issue of divergence between the Union and its beneficiaries was the fact that some beneficiaries did not even bother to spend the funds for acquisitions made available to them by the State. After the 1968 National Conference of the Romanian Artists' Union, the Romanian leadership increased the amount of funds for acquisitions by increasing the number of beneficiaries. Thus, besides the State Committee for Culture and Art, which had been the traditional purchaser of works of art, the UTC, UGSR and the GP also became buyers. This new allocation of funds was announced triumphantly by the art historian Ion Frunzetti, the vice-president of the Union, and heralded as a great victory on behalf of the Union leadership:

The year 1969 seems to be a particularly favourable year for our artists. [...] This phenomenon meant not a doubling of artists' funds but an increase of 250% [...] To the 18 million [*lei*] [...] traditionally available to the CSCA – 6 million for monumental art, 6 million for acquisitions, 6 millions for the counties [local branches] – has been added 15 million to be distributed through three mass organisations: The Communist Youth Union, The National Trade Union and *Gospodaria de Partid* [...] plus 4 million for pensions and a further 8 million for the same Fine Arts Direction [within the CSCA] that finished its 18 million in funds. The total is 45 million, instead of 18.³⁶

This extraordinary change was part of the courting strategy adopted by the Romanian leadership after coming to power. This practice of *captatio benevolentiae* clearly resembles what had happened in the Soviet Union at the first Writers'

³⁶ ASB, *fond* 2239, UAP, File 5/1969, *Minutes of the Graphic Section's Plenary*, 16 January 1969, 78.

Congress. Like their Soviet counterparts,³⁷ Romanian artists were lauded by Ceaușescu and were asked, at the same time, to play a more active role in the development of communism in Romania. It is noteworthy that this increase in funding was not realised through direct distribution to the Union (with the exception of a small amount intended for pensions), but was made (potentially) available through other organisations. This, therefore, was not an expression of generosity and respect towards the artistic community. In order to gain access to these funds, artists were in effect asked to produce works according to official criteria, to meet the demands of the new beneficiaries, something now more difficult than before. Negotiations with the new beneficiaries were more difficult than with the CSCA, the beneficiary the Union had traditionally dealt with, because the people in charge of acquisitions at these organisations had very little aesthetic training. The leadership of the Union, as well as the artists whose works were commissioned by the new beneficiaries, were frequently at odds with the representatives of the beneficiaries. They were not only poorly trained, artistically speaking; they also showed no interest in the commissioning process. The result was a failure to spend the funds allocated to them and, as a direct consequence, a drop in artist earnings.

The way the UAP leadership dealt with this issue is highly indicative of the atmosphere in Romania at the end of the 1960s and the image Ceaușescu had acquired among artists. The president of the Union, Brăduț Covaliu, wrote a letter to Ceaușescu in which he disclosed the beneficiaries' disinclination to spend allocated funds.³⁸ The letter opened with a meticulous calculation of artist earnings³⁹ and the

³⁷ 'The effusive honouring of writers in connection with the First Congress of Soviet Writers in 1934 established the new tone, which combined conspicuous deference to high culture with an implicit reminder to intellectuals of their obligation to serve the Soviet cause.', Sheila Fitzpatrick, *Everyday Stalinism, Ordinary Life in Extraordinary Times: Soviet Russia in the 1930s* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1999), 96. For the same topic see also Jeffrey Brooks, 'Socialist Realism in Pravda: Read All about It!', *Slavic Review*, Vol. 53, No. 4, Winter 1994, 976-981.

³⁸ The above situation falls within the pattern of what Sheila Fitzpatrick calls 'brokering [on behalf of] the professional interests of a group'. She describes a similar situation, when Aleksandr Fadeev, secretary of the Writers' Union, wrote to Molotov to complain, on behalf of the literary community, that no Stalin Prizes had been earmarked for literature that year and to tackle the problem of royalties and taxation of the writers' incomes. Sheila Fitzpatrick, *op.cit.*, 112.

³⁹ 'During the first nine months of 1970, artists' income [...] amounted to 27,024,021 lei, of which 40% is in fact the quota spent on the materials used, the real sum earned by artists, as their benefice,

comment that the average monthly income of an artist was comparable with that of someone with no higher education.⁴⁰ He went on to identify the causes of UAP's difficult financial situation as being the insufficient amount of funds allocated to the CSCA and the flawed utilisation of funds by the UGSR and the GP.⁴¹ The way the UAP president distinguished between the two unbalanced groups of beneficiaries, as well as the designation of the CSCA as the 'main [organisation] entrusted with supporting our artistic creation',⁴² were significant points, for they highlighted the tense relationships between the UAP and the two 'un-professional' beneficiaries. Furthermore, he did not insist in his letter on solutions that would resolve the relationships to the two beneficiaries, which would have been at any rate futile. He focused instead on the CSCA's defective acquisition policy. The CSCA, Covaliu wrote, had its own acquisition policy that aimed to cover the works of art required for 'the manifestations within its annual thematic plan – the annual State exhibitions, the special commemorative exhibitions [...] the Romanian art exhibitions abroad'.⁴³ After all these manifestations had been covered, there were little, if any, funds remaining for purchasing from the individual or group exhibitions the Union staged throughout the year.⁴⁴ Furthermore, a second reason identified by Covaliu for the insufficient level of artist earnings was the falling level of acquisition prices offered by the CSCA in comparison with previous years, which

being approximately 18,000,000 *lei*. Distributed among the 1,865 members of the RAU, the result is that each artist earns an average monthly wage of 1600 *lei*.' ASB, *fond* 2239, UAP, File 17/1970, 119.

⁴⁰ '...this monthly income does not correspond at all, being the equivalent of the wages earned by cadres without higher education.', *Ibid*.

⁴¹ The UTC does not appear in this letter as a beneficiary that caused problems for the Union by not spending its funds or spending them badly. On the contrary, it is identified as the only beneficiary of the three 'un-professional' beneficiaries that 'used its funds entirely'. In point of fact, the relationship between the UAP and the UTC seems to have been rather satisfactory for both parties, according to archival documents of the period. Perhaps this situation was caused by the president of UTC at the time, Ion Iliescu, who was dismissed from the first echelon of power for being an 'intellectualist' after he opposed the implementation of the July Theses'.

⁴² ASB, *fond* 2239, UAP, File 17/1970, 119.

⁴³ *Ibid*, 120.

⁴⁴ 'This phenomenon limits considerably the possibility that the CSCA purchased works of art from personal or group exhibitions that the UAP held during the year. After paying for the works commissioned (albeit these commissions do not exceed one work per artist and, furthermore, not all artists received commissions), the funds available for acquisitions from the RAU exhibitions are totally insufficient.', *Ibid*.

were lower than the average rate established for acquisitions.⁴⁵ Moreover, Covaliu referred to the large amounts that went unspent by the UGSR and the GP due to their lack of implication in the commissioning process.⁴⁶ The letter ended by describing the desperate situation many artists lived in due to not receiving the money they deserved for commissioned or finished works or because they had not obtained a commission for many years due to the scarcity of available funds.

We do not know what, if any, response Ceaușescu gave. Until further materials become available, we must make do with a picture of the direction in which things were moving in those years given by additional documents. After the launch of the July Theses, the funds allocated to artists diminished drastically.⁴⁷ The UAP leadership was asked to produce a report on artist income covering the last few years. The report was written very meticulously and included differentiated data by section, average wages by sections, a list of the best paid artists, and so on. In addition to this report, the Ministry of Finance conducted its own investigation, the results of which were sent to the *Consiliul Culturii și Educației Socialiste* (CCES)/The Council of Socialist Culture and Education, the newly founded body that replaced the State Committee for Culture and Art. The informative note of the Ministry of Finance concluded that the funds allocated were 'surpassing the real needs' of the Union and that the annual subsidy of 3,800,000 *lei* towards the payment of pensions should be cut.⁴⁸ Furthermore, the Ministry proposed that the decree which exempted the Union from the payment of tax on general income be rethought.⁴⁹

⁴⁵ Covaliu also provided figures for the CSCA acquisitions during the previous three years. For instance, for an easel painting with a figurative composition, the highest sum that the CSCA paid was 20,000 *lei*, while the average tariff was 22,000 *lei* (the minimum was 4000 *lei* and maximum 40,000 *lei*); for an exterior sculpture, a figurative composition, of up to 3m, the price paid was similar at 20,000 *lei*, with a minimum of 12,000 *lei* and a maximum of 40,000 *lei*., Ibid, 121.

⁴⁶ During the previous three years, from funds of 15,000,000 *lei* each, the GP spent 4,422,707 *lei*, while the UGS spent 10,786,719 *lei*., Ibid, 122.

⁴⁷ This was a general phenomenon that affected all art unions and publishing houses, literary or specialist journals. On this see Irina Culic, 'The Strategies of Intellectuals: Romania under Communist Rule in Comparative Perspective', in András Bozóki (ed.), *Intellectuals and Politics in Central Europe* (Budapest: Central European University Press, 1999), 52.

⁴⁸ ASB, 2239, *fond* UAP, File 21/1971, 63.

⁴⁹ Ibid.

All the methods described above began to work in time. The result was a different type of artist. Frustrated by receiving one rejection after another (with the immediate and real consequences of a drop in income), artists began to adapt to the requirements and tastes of the activists and to produce works that respected the acquisition criteria but had little or no artistic value. This situation was acknowledged during a Union meeting, where responsibility for the very low quality of the works sent for evaluation was placed on the shoulders of the beneficiaries. The art critic Octavian Barbosa said of this vicious circle:

Even the Commission [The Commission for Monumental Art] is often sent works of very poor artistic quality. Many times I have heard people saying that the beneficiary, using it as a kind of scapegoat, is responsible for this, that because of the beneficiary I did that, that it was the beneficiary who asked for the work to be done in such a way, that I was wrong and so on.⁵⁰

3.3. The Leadership of the UAP – An Elitist Body within the Union

The role of the Union both as an institution of guidance and control was duplicated by the attitude of its leadership, which gradually became a privileged elite eager to maintain its position by courting members of the political hierarchy and trying to implement their directives as faithfully as possible. The repeatedly stated democratic nature of the Union and exhibitions involving large numbers of Union members did not manage to hide the leadership's private practices in terms of the manipulation of funds, commissions, distribution of invitations to exhibitions abroad, etc. The leadership became a privileged body that dealt with the distribution of funds, the formation of evaluation commissions for exhibitions and acquisitions, and negotiations with the higher echelons. In effect, in the Union leadership, at the meetings of the Executive Bureau and the Union's Party Section, all important

⁵⁰ ASB, *fond 2239*, UAP, File 9/1970, *Minutes of the Plenary Meeting of the Painting Section*, 8 July 1970, 42.

issues were addressed and decisions taken within ideologically permitted limits and in line with the interests of the participants.⁵¹

At the 1968 National Conference of the UAP, the problem of an emerging elite body managing the Union's funds for its own benefit was raised by several artists. The most vehement of these was Marius Cilievici.⁵² Cilievici accused the emergence of a privileged group, composed of the members of the Union leadership and their acolytes.⁵³ This privileged group, he said, had gained complete control of the Union through the establishment of a three-fold monopoly: a sentimental monopoly, a monopoly of artistic information and an organisational-administrative monopoly. Of these three forms of monopoly described by Cilievici, the first is of most interest to us. The sentimental monopoly, which Cilievici described as 'the exclusivity of attachment to the cause of socialism, to the faith of the Party, the monopoly of socialist fundamentalism and consciousness',⁵⁴ provides a clue to the leadership's attitude to the Party authorities. It says a lot about the conciliatory or

⁵¹ There are already numerous studies that describe this phenomenon in the case of the Soviet Writers' Union. See Ronald Hingley, *Russian Writers and Soviet Society, 1917-1978* (London: Weidenfeld and Nicolson, 1979); John and Carol Garrard, *Inside the Soviet Writers' Union* (New York, London: The Free Press, Macmillan, 1990) and Vera Tolz, 'Cultural Bosses' as Patrons and Clients: the Functioning of the Soviet Creative Unions in the Postwar Period', *Contemporary European History*, Vol. 2, No. 1, 2002, 87-105. Similarly, for a description of the patron-client relationships in the Soviet Composers' Union see Kiril Tomoff, 'Most Respected Comrade...': Patrons, Clients, Brokers and Unofficial Networks in the Stalinist Music World', *Contemporary European History*, Vol. 2, No. 1, 2002, 33-65. On the same issue in the Czechoslovak art world see Maruška Svašek, 'Contacts: Social Dynamics in the Czechoslovak State-Socialist World', *Contemporary European History*, Vol. 2, No. 1, 2002, 67-86.

⁵² Other interventions on this matter were more focused and triggered by the proposal of certain artists for leadership positions: 'As far as Comrade Bitzan is concerned, in my opinion he is a very good comrade, he has great qualities, he is a very good painter, but has a tendency to accumulate funds.' (Lia Szasz, ASB, *fond* 2239, UAP, File 14/1968, *The Third National Conference of RAU*, 17-19 April 1968, 370). Or: 'I do not agree with the selection of Comrade Codiță because it is well known that he has a great desire to acquire commissions, to line his pockets, without thinking that there are others who should work too, who should also live. He has never thought of others, he was always like a hyena, he knows everything...' (Aurel Țipoia, *Ibid*, 371).

⁵³ The raising of this issue at such an important forum proves that National Conferences were also used by rank-and-file members of the Union to bring up matters of unfair attitudes or un-resolved problems within the Union. The situation resembles what happened at the Soviet Writers' Congresses: 'While Writers' Congresses are occasions for the public re-dedication of the writers to the Party and the people, they are also opportunities for the open voicing of sectional demands.', L.G. Chirchward, *The Soviet Intelligentsia, An essay on the social structure and roles of Soviet intellectuals during the 1960s* (London and Boston: Rutledge & Kegan Paul, 1973), 66.

⁵⁴ *Ibid*, 333.

openly obedient acceptance of the rules imposed by the Party. It says even more about the manner in which this acceptance took place. It sheds light on aspects for which for the time being there no documents are available (excepting the congratulatory letters published in *Arta* on various occasions), but which should have been clear to contemporaries. We are referring here to manifestations that went beyond the simple acceptance of the *status quo* and ended in exaggerations, self initiative and the superfluous praising of the Party and its leadership.

Discussions on this theme also continued during the internal meetings of the Union. At the beginning of the 1970s, the art critic Anca Arghir observed the same old practices at work within the Union. She identified the establishment of a network of clients who held a de facto monopoly over the commissioned works of the previous four or five years:

What is intriguing is the fact that the distribution of commissions takes place among a very limited number of Union members, by assigning projects to very close friends, to relatives, to family members... And this has been happening for some time now. If we take a four or five year old list of commissioned works we see that they contain the same names, that the same artists hold a monopoly over commissioned works.⁵⁵

Sometimes the discovery of this practice, which took place behind closed doors, occurred by simple accident, as one artist related during a meeting:

I went to *Scînteia* House and it was full of projects, but none of these have ever been announced. [...] The commissions are taken only by the privileged few, by those 'preferred'. As to the others, where should they go? Under the bourgeois system one could go to another boyar! But now where is one to go?⁵⁶

⁵⁵ ASB, *fond* 2239, UAP, File 6/1970, *Minutes of the Bucharest Painting Section's Meeting*, January 1970, 11.

⁵⁶ ASB, *fond* 2239, UAP, File 9/1969, *Minutes of the Plenary Meeting of the Sculpture Section*, 29 May 1969, 20.

Paradoxical situations were also reported. Some contests had a single entrant. They had been designed for a particular person and the result was announced after the competition had taken place as if all were totally natural: 'It is said that in the 'Avram Iancu' competition there was a single competitor. But how many of you have even heard of this competition?'⁵⁷

The discussions were even more vivid when it came to the practice of hiding or delaying information about international contests, practices which were common if an important commission was to be assigned. Information was even more limited when it came to international exhibitions. Being selected for an international exhibition brought with it benefits which, though they may seem unimportant today, were vital during the communist period. The selected artist had the opportunity to visit museums, to make contact and exchange views with other artists at the event, and to establish contact with foreign art dealers or gallery owners – not to mention the more trivial advantages of receiving a daily allowance in foreign currency.⁵⁸ Therefore, the distribution of the foreign grants or the sharing of information about international contests always took place within limited circles. As one angry artist, Comrade Severineanu, said during a meeting:

... as far as the international contests are concerned, do not keep them secret; do not let just only a few know about them, have time to prepare properly for them, while to the rest of us you announce them just a few weeks before or even two or three days before the deadline. Make everything public well in advance, as well as artists' yearly income and the commissions they have received. We have been asking for this for years....⁵⁹

⁵⁷ Ibid.

⁵⁸ It seems that these kind of travels abroad represented an important way of earning and saving foreign currency, something some people took to an extreme, as one Government decision reads: '[The employees of a socialist organisation] should not hinder the fulfilment of the task for which they are travelling abroad by becoming sick as a result of the over eating of tinned food brought from Romania or excessive saving of the daily allowance.'

⁵⁹ ASB, fond 2239, UAP, File 7/1970, *Minutes of the Plenary Meeting of the Sculpture Section*, 14 March 1968, 5.

The demand for transparency in the distribution of commissions or funds was reiterated by a Union member who requested the staging of an annual exhibition encompassing all the works purchased during each given year:

I propose that once a year – at the end of the year or the beginning of the following year – an exhibition be held [...] with all the works acquired and with the contracts which have been already signed, from all the counties of the country. I consider this to be in our interest [...] to know how our comrades who make acquisitions think...⁶⁰

Furthermore, the artists asked that the annual incomes of the Union members – the leadership included – be made public. When the lists of artists' income were finally made available, they were seen by only a few people before being removed from view only a few days later. The explanation given by the leadership for this move was at best unconvincing. They pretended they had been asked by the Ministry of Internal Affairs not to display any such information in an open space [on the notice board in the Union hall] where so many different people entered, sometimes even representatives of foreign embassies.⁶¹

The denunciation of incorrect commissioning practices also took on collective forms. The following describes what happened when a group of artists from the county of Cluj sent a letter to the Central Committee of the UTC to report the defective attribution of commissions in respect of a project that was financially important for the city:

The Central Committee of the Communist Youth Union, aware of the mobilising role of works of art, gave an 800,000 *lei* commission to the Cluj branch of the UAP for the decoration of the Student House and other sites in Cluj.

⁶⁰ ASB, *fond 2239*, UAP, File 5/1970, *Minutes of Plenary Meeting of the RAU*, 24 December 1970, 94-95.

⁶¹ ASB, *fond 2239*, UAP, File 5/1971, *Minutes of the General Meeting of the Monumental Art Section*, April 1971, 7.

While appreciating the substantial investment of the Party and State organs in increasing the ideological, artistic and cultural level of our city, we want to bring to your attention the unjust attribution of the works mentioned. Arbitrariness and subjective opinions were, we consider, the only basis of these attributions [...] Works have been attributed to some artists whose professional abilities were not confirmed even by being accepted for official exhibitions at national or county levels.⁶²

The most disappointing aspect for most Union members was to discover that it was their own colleagues who initiated and supported their removal from the acquisitions list. The competition for limited resources corrupted relationships between members of the Union, turning them against each other and favouring the emergence of groups and short term interests, transforming them, especially members of the leadership, into mini dictators who promoted their own clients:

I have noticed a very negative and ugly attitude on behalf of some of our colleagues who are members of the Bureau, an attitude manifested during the jurisdiction process and during the meetings for acquisition and distribution of commissions. [...] How such a thing could be tolerated, how a section leader could come and make unjust judgments about another member of the Union, saying that that one is not good enough, the other is such and such thing and the works of a third one do not have a decent level to be purchased...⁶³

The discussions held in the Union's internal meetings seemed to be limited to anodyne issues, small points that needed addressing here and there, while the important matters were resolved within the closed circle of the leadership. These occupied the majority of the meetings and gave rise to the most vivid debates. As Corneliu Baba, one of Romania's most important painters, remarked of Union

⁶² ASB, fond 2239, UAP, File 46/1969-1971, *Letter sent by a group of artists from the county Cluj to the Central Committee of the Communist Youth Union, Cluj*, 9 February 1970, 177-178.

⁶³ ASB, fond 2239, UAP, File 9/1969, *Minutes of the Plenary Meeting of the Sculpture Section*, 29 May 1969, 3.

meetings, only a part of the problems of real interest for the rank-and-file members were addressed:

I am wondering if this is the best system?! If we were to make an assessment of our meetings I think it would prove a little monotonous: pensions, guests, current affairs. And other issues are resolved by obscure means. They cannot be discussed here. We should know about them, not find out about them from outside. I am referring of course to commissions, foreign grants, which are distributed behind closed doors. Our meetings are reduced to minor problems while others are not addressed here at all.⁶⁴

Further discussions pointed to the monotonous atmosphere in the Union, describing a generally unstimulating environment which 'leads to general disinterest'.⁶⁵ Moreover, the relationships between members of the Union were described as being based on mistrust and a lack of solidarity. The painter Paul Gherasim argued against the strict, militarised climate, in which everybody was suspicious and ready to blame colleagues who appeared not to respect the official line:

When an exhibition is open in town, it seems that it needs to receive the unanimous approval of the critics or of the public, everybody must be very wary that a heretical act does not take place. We have the constant feeling [...] that from time to time a young artist is accused of being a heretic. [...] ...in such an atmosphere nothing can be done, art cannot be transformed into a cultural act [...] we will remain of the mentality that we are only producers of pictures for people's apartments, people who furnish their houses with furniture, with vases, and then finally they hang a picture on the wall too.[...] we have the feeling that the Union is a kind of blocker, instead of being an

⁶⁴ ASB, *fond 2239*, UAP, File 96/1969, *Minutes of the Executive Bureau's Meeting*, 4 June 1970, 100.

This situation resembles very much what happened in the internal meetings of the Soviet Writers' Union. For instance, the poet Oleg Dmitriev says that during the internal meeting of the Moscow chapter, professional issues were completely ignored while writers 'debate the number of copies which a given author managed to publish, royalties, the number of travels abroad, what apartments writers have, who flirts with whom, and so on.'; Vladimir Shlapentokh, *Soviet Intellectuals and Political Power, The Post-Stalin Era* (Princeton, New Jersey: Princeton University Press, 1990).

⁶⁵ ASB, *fond 2239*, UAP, File 15/1970, *Minutes of Meeting of the Art Critique Section*, 40.

institution that supports our interests. [...] It looks like we are in a militarised space where we should permanently be very careful not to fall into heresy.⁶⁶

3.4. *Other Mechanisms of Control*

One of the most important mechanisms of control and shaping relationships within the Union was exercised through the exhibitions policy. The large numbers of Union members competing for a limited number of exhibition halls would have been a problem enough for the UAP leadership even under normal circumstances. The situation was complicated still further, however, by the addition of various strict bureaucratic criteria. In fact, the criteria used to allocate exhibition halls favoured not only certain types of works but also a certain type of artist. Let us take a look at a series of criteria drawn up at meeting of the Painting Section on 17 January 1969 concerning the staging of personal exhibitions. The list contains three points. Firstly, every artist has the right to hold a personal exhibition once every three years. Secondly, any artist who requests a hall for a personal exhibition should have performed previous 'intense activity at State exhibitions'.⁶⁷ Thirdly, any requests by the young members – those admitted to the Union during 1968 – were to be postponed until 1970. Apart from the first criterion, which is still practiced by many galleries today and can be seen as illustrative of the democratic nature of the UAP at the time, the second and third criteria clearly represent political positions. Not only was every member of the Union, regardless of age or value, required to confirm on a constant basis his or her commitment and support for the Party by sending works to the State exhibitions, but young artists, who were presumably more inclined to experimentation, were expected to understand, accept and adapt to the internal rules of survival in the Union. The two year break 'offered' by the Union (a period in which the young artists could/should send works to the State exhibitions) could be interpreted in this way. The system was designed such that artists could not avoid producing ideologically-aligned works if they wanted to continue staging personal

⁶⁶ Ibid, 43-44.

⁶⁷ ASB, *fond* 2239, UAP, File 17/1968, *Minutes of the Painting Section Meeting*, 17 January 1969, 32.

exhibitions. Furthermore, it was always possible to short-circuit the system and reduce the long waiting period by sending works to the State exhibitions that would single out the artist as 'reliable'. Thus, the system not only attempted to produce ideologically-oriented works, but also artists committed to the Party requirements. Understanding this mechanism is of the utmost importance because it reveals how, once the rules of the game were accepted and the artist immersed into this net of causal steps, he or she inevitably became caught up in the mechanism as well. The more an artist moved into the foreground by producing works acceptable to the Party, the more he or she needed to contribute in order to maintain his or her privileged position.

In order to understand better how these mechanisms were applied, it may be of help to discuss in detail the preparations for the 1971 exhibition entitled '50 Years from the Foundation of the Romanian Communist Party'. This was the most important event on the Union's agenda for that year. Considerable resources were allocated by all three beneficiaries (the State Committee for Culture and Art, the National Trade Union and the Communist Youth Union) and the selection criteria for the works in the exhibition were established clearly. At an internal meeting of the Union for the organisation of this exhibition, representatives of the beneficiaries were present and made their offer and demands known. The beneficiaries offered contracts on the basis of sketches produced by the artists. The UTC provided a number of 70 contracts and study trips in plants and on industrial sites for young artists. The CSCA offered 50 contracts including 5 or 6 devoted to the 150th anniversary of the Revolution of 1821 led by Tudor Vladimirescu.⁶⁸ The representative of the CSCA, Anastase Anastasiu, promised that his institution was ready to supplement the number of contracts if the works produced by artists met with the initial requirements. He went further still by suggesting that the works not be of large dimensions so as to be easily accommodated in institutions. Furthermore, the CSCA was interested more in compositions than portraits or landscapes. Finally, the art

⁶⁸ ASB, *fond* 2239, UAP, File 17/1968-1971, *Minutes of the Plenary Meeting of the Painting Section*, 21 August 1970, 72.

critic Anatol Mândrescu took the floor in order to underline the final and most important details:

This is a thematic exhibition, a homage exhibition for our Party and, consequently, it cannot be a exhibition representative of all the forms of expression in our contemporary art [...] It is necessary that the programme-themes reach a certain degree of consciousness, of understanding of the moment's signification, that the works be figurative although this does not exclude the use of symbol.⁶⁹

Several other meetings followed. One of the most important was that held at the Central Committee headquarters. The meeting was chaired by Dumitru Popescu, the then president of the Section for Propaganda in the Central Committee. As the president of the UAP, Brăduț Covaliu recounted after the meeting, at a briefing of the Union's Executive Bureau, how the Party was extremely interested in the organisation of the exhibition and wished to receive periodic progress reports.⁷⁰ Covaliu also mentioned that the works of art to be selected for the exhibition were to be 'readable, accessible to a wide audience'.⁷¹ This was slightly different from the indications he had given previously and was clearly the result of his discussions with the Party authorities. After the introductory address given by the Union's president, the representatives of the beneficiaries started to explain their positions and requirements regarding the Party anniversary exhibition. The Director of the Fine Arts Section within the CSCA, Anastase Anastasiu, presented the proposed themes, which ranged from the period of illegality of the Party to the contemporary period with the Party triumphantly leading the country. He divided the themes of the exhibition into six categories:

⁶⁹ Ibid.

⁷⁰ 'It is necessary that the State Committee for Culture and Art inform our Party of the manner in which the exhibition is being prepared, give an assessment of how many works will be in the exhibition, the stages in the mounting of the exhibition, the rhythm in which the artists work.', Brăduț Covaliu, ASB, *fond* 2239, UAP, File 96/1969-1970, *Minutes of the Executive Bureau Meeting*, 46.

⁷¹ Ibid, 45.

- I. Themes that depict the preparation and the organisation of the Congress for the founding of the Party and the selection of delegates for the Congress, the international solidarity, the struggle and solidarity of the Romanian communists for the liberation of our country and of other countries;
- II. The underground struggle of the PCR, the leading force of our people;
- III. The preparation of the 23 August 1944 act, the struggle against fascism;
- IV. The activity of the Party in the period 1944-47, the agrarian reform, 6 March 1945, the nationalisation of the main means of production, the take-over of power by the working class, the socialist transformation of agriculture;
- V. The construction of socialism in our country, the five-year plans, the political, social and cultural achievements;
- VI. 'MAN', the contemporary man, aspects of the labour and life of our people'⁷²

Both the themes proposed by the UTC and the UGSR were similar, although the UTC chose to emphasise the role played by the youth in the foundation of the Party, while the UGSR concentrated more on the workers' strikes.

Apart from the delineation of themes to be used in the anniversary exhibition, artists received suggestions as to the way their works should be realised. Vasile Dinu, vice-president of the CSCA, recommended that:

Emphasis should be placed on the optimistic side of things, because our Party won and continues to fight for the development of our society.⁷³ Therefore, themes depicting everyday life in our country were also proposed.⁷⁴

⁷² Ibid, 47.

⁷³ This echoes one of the fundamental principles of socialist realist art in which the depiction of optimism/optimistic scenes was an oft repeated demand. See Mark Bassin, '“I object to rain that is cheerless”: landscape art and the Stalinist aesthetic imagination', in *Ecumene*, Vol. 7, No. 3, July 2000.

⁷⁴ ASB, *fond* 2239, UAP, File 96/1969-1970, *Minutes of the Executive Bureau Meeting*, 46.

He also insisted that artists should submit their works well in advance, in order that the exhibition be prepared with suitable care and opened with great pomp.⁷⁵

Despite the numerous sessions devoted to the important upcoming exhibitions, the allusion made to material stimuli and the verbal reminders of the leadership, the results did not come soon enough. A few months before the opening day, the leadership discovered that the works produced by the artists were not suitable for an exhibition of such importance. The leadership was particularly disappointed with the way important artists had not responded suitably to the Union's demands. The president of the Union, the painter Brăduț Covaliu, said the only solution the Union could propose under the circumstances was to ask certain artists to contribute works, so as to assure the 'basis of the exhibition'.⁷⁶

On the other hand, the public's attention was carefully kept focussed on the realisation of the exhibition with the help of a large campaign in the press. Artists were periodically interviewed about their progress with their works, the significance of the exhibition for the country, the Union and themselves. For example, one of the most famous Romanian sculptors of the period, Ion Jalea, a sculptor who had already established himself as a leading artistic figure during the interwar period and successfully continued his work under communism, gave an interview to *Scînteia* in which he stressed the fact that participation in the exhibition '50 Years from the Foundation of the Romanian Communist Party' was the duty of every single artist in Romania:

Participation in this exhibition is an act of patriotism, which for every one of us means a demonstration of his or her quality as a citizen-artist. Our works, I believe, should reflect this spirit of patriotic devotion [to the Party] as thoroughly as possible.⁷⁷

⁷⁵ Ibid.

⁷⁶ ASB, fond 2239, UAP, File 5/1970, *Minutes of the Plenary Meeting of the RAU*, 24 December 1970, 7.

⁷⁷ *Scînteia*, 4 October, 1970.

A month and a half later, he gave another interview in which he divulged what his contribution to the exhibition would be:

I am working on a different sculpture which draws upon the history of our people. It will represent the *voievod* Mircea the Old [...]. I devote this work to the Romanian Communist Party, the continuer of the noblest traditions of the history of our motherland.⁷⁸

The documents looked at here demonstrate the enormous amount of attention that was paid to the organisation of the PCR anniversary exhibition. They underline the various mechanisms used in assembling an exhibition that was to follow the main ideological criteria and meet the expectations of the leadership. The most interesting parts, of course, are those that encompass the thematic directions and specific observations of the optimistic atmosphere that was to transpire from the paintings. What is also important in underlining the role the Union leadership played in the organisation of exhibitions such as this is its oscillating attitude as a result of directions received from higher echelons. The financial rewards promised and the coverage of the organisational process by the press complete the picture of how important exhibitions were organised and reveal the mechanisms used to stimulate artists to produce works that were in line with official requirements.

The above example leads us to another mechanism used to control art production in Romania: the imposition of strict themes within State organised exhibitions. Although most artists seem to have accepted the given situation and tried to gain material advantage from it, there were some who raised their voices against what was considered an intrusive, limiting practice that corrupted the creation of a work of art *per se*. For instance, the sculptor Nicolae Enea challenged the practice of

⁷⁸ *Munca*, 24 November 1970.

In the same issue of the *Munca* newspaper, other important artists also revealed what they were working on: 'Wanda Sachelarie will depict the arrival of Tudor Vladimirescu in Bucharest, Gabriela Pătulea-Drăguț is working on a composition entitled 'The Strike', Ion Bitzan is finishing the work 'The Poetry of Work'....

imposing certain themes that were expected to be followed like dogma. He questioned the effectiveness of this practice:

The fact that we are asked to follow certain themes, which sound like a dogma in which you have to believe and not to think about or to question is something embarrassing.⁷⁹

A practice considered equally obsolete and damaging was that of imposing hierarchically rigid criteria for the evaluation of a work of art. The art critic Mircea Popescu described the mania of establishing hierarchies according to resolute and outdated criteria, of dividing art into major and minor genres and assessing a work of art according only to such elements. By contrast, he spoke about the duty the Union had to protect the few groups which coalesced within the Union and did not necessarily follow the official line. In other words, he tried to remind the Union leadership that its duty was to support and encourage all members of the Union, even those who did not produce works that followed the official line:

... the UAP maintains the idea of major and minor arts, keeps some hierarchies and some criteria against which artists elsewhere revolt [...] it has this conception which should possibly be brought into discussion [...] It also has the duty to support and to treat suitably the problems of these nuclei which appear with great difficulty and against a lot of inertia...⁸⁰

Popescu's hinting at unaligned nuclei within the Union in fact refers to the younger generation, to those who matured artistically outside the strict canon of socialist realism. This generation was usually influenced by Western trends or simply eager to follow paths other than the official one and resuscitate avant-garde currents fashionable in Romanian art during the first half of the twentieth century. One of the

⁷⁹ ASB, *fond* 2239, UAP, File 13/1970, *Minutes of the Plenary Meeting of the Sculpture Section*, 12 June 1970, 55.

⁸⁰ ASB, *fond* 2239, UAP, File 7/1971, *Minutes of the Meeting of the Art Critique Section*, 25 May 1971, 27.

most difficult tasks of the Union leadership was to tame this younger generation, to enlist it in the ranks of the docile members of the Union.⁸¹

A first mechanism for controlling the young artists consisted of the admissions procedure to the Union. The selection criteria were set in such a way that artists could not avoid producing works with thematic content. In order to join the Union an artist had to have participated in a certain number of exhibitions. As a result, emphasis was not placed on the quality of works but on purely quantitative criteria. As, on the other hand, it was impossible for a non-member of the Union to stage personal exhibitions, he or she had to fulfil his or her quota by participating in collective manifestations. These exhibitions were more often than not thematic. Therefore, the young aspirant to the status of UAP membership was forced to produce ideologically validated works in order to round off his or her portfolio and apply for membership. Needless to say, these admission criteria had nothing to do with producing quality work, albeit this may have happened on various occasions.⁸²

Another way of forcing young artists to contribute a certain quota of ideologically aligned works was through the distribution of awards. The selection of artists for certain exhibitions or awards was always made according to bureaucratic criteria. In order to enter a competition, the artist was supposed to have participated in a certain number of State exhibitions; talent and artistic production counted for less.⁸³ This is

⁸¹ Miklós Haraszti advances the same idea, albeit by looking at a different aspect – the facilities a young artist could receive in order to be more easily transformed into a malleable collaborator: 'The state pays special attention to young artists at the beginning of their careers who are assisted with funding for accommodation and studios and are supported by various scholarships.', Miklós Haraszti, *The Velvet Prison: Artists Under State Socialism* (New York: The Noonday Press, 1989), 63.

⁸² The situation described here bears much in common with what happened in the creative unions of the Soviet Union. For instance, in a study dealing with the investigation of the Soviet Writers' Union the circumstances depicted are strikingly similar: 'Quality, however, is left off the list of requirements. The Writers' Union is no exception to the general rule in Soviet society, where corruption and favouritism play a big part in decisions on appointments and admissions to educational institutions and other organizations. Émigrés cited many cases of mediocre writers who were admitted just because they had fulfilled the minimum publication requirement and had influential friends. They stressed that a book, for the purposes of Union admission, could be "almost any piece of garbage as long as it was printed between hard covers"', John and Carol Garrard, *Inside the Soviet Writers' Union* (New York, London: The Free Press, Macmillan, 1990), 111.

⁸³ ASB, fond 2239, UAP, File 6/1970, *Minutes of the Bucharest Painting Section's Meeting*, 3.

not to say that the winner of the final award was always an untalented artist. It only describes the tribute necessary to pay in order to be considered a potential candidate for the Union's awards. It also had an additional purpose: to destroy the myth of the pure, uncompromised artist, to prevent anyone from building an image for himself or herself on the grounds of total non-participation in the Party's cultural policy.

Supplementary mechanisms of control aiming specifically at the young generation concerned the acceptance of the young members to the Union as collaborators with the *Fondul Plastic*.⁸⁴ As *Fondul Plastic* was the only organisation through which artists could commercialise their works (besides through contracts signed with the beneficiaries), it was essential for them to be able to join it. But in order to be accepted, each graduate needed to respect his or her repartition order, namely to work at the place (school, factory, branch of the Artists' Union, etc.) he or she was sent to by the State.⁸⁵ If the young artist failed to respect repartition upon graduation, he or she was deprived of one of the very few means of legal material support.⁸⁶

Why would someone be so eager to become a member of a Union about which rumours of corruption already existed, which applied such absurd admission criteria and handcuffed its members, allowing them very little space for personal initiative? The answer is that an artist simply could not exist outside an institutionalised organisation. Better said, a citizen of the Socialist Republic of Romania could not justify his or her non-membership of, non-enrolment in an organisation in a country

⁸⁴ *Fondul Plastic* was an institution affiliated to the Union whose purpose was to commercialise the production of the Union's members.

⁸⁵ ASB, *fond* 2239, UAP, File17/1968, *Minutes of the Painting Section's Bureau Meeting*, 22 December 1969, 56.

⁸⁶ The practice of spreading graduates across the country was a general one and one which continued right up to the end of the regime. The regime took pride in this and the propaganda apparatus never ceased to depict the differences between the democratic socialist system's concern for the fate of the young generation and the disinterest the capitalist societies showed towards this matter. *Scînteia* frequently published photographs and caricatures of young people standing in queues in front of (usually closed) Human Resources Offices in Western countries. As far as the Romanian practice is concerned, it led, as many other absurd practices from which people tried to escape, to the development of an entire network of connections with the support of which the practice could be avoided.

where the small number of unemployed were officially labelled parasites.⁸⁷ Thus, first and foremost, the Union was an institution that provided status (that of being employed), spared its members continuous police harassment, offered them the possibility to sell their works, and guaranteed a fixed income on retirement. On top of this, there was also the opportunity for rapid advancement which cumulated in important material advantages so long as the artist had good connections and a flexible backbone.

On the other hand, as has often been remarked, the art Unions, through their system of internal promotion, attracted and favoured a certain type of artist.⁸⁸ This phenomenon was analysed with reference to the Soviet writer. It was pointed out that the image of the Soviet writer common in the West – of the individual fighting the establishment, smuggling across borders texts denouncing the hostile cultural Party policy – was totally misleading. Not only was this type of writer a totally isolated occurrence, but the system itself corrupted habits, altered norms of elementary human behaviour, ultimately producing a new type of artist.⁸⁹

The changes in cultural policy that appeared at the beginning of the 1970s (The July Theses and the protochronist theory) and which came after the period of liberalisation at the end of the 1960s caused a polarisation of the artistic field

⁸⁷ 'The Union dominated the literary environment to such a degree that anyone who wanted to make a living as a creative writer had little choice but to belong, or hope to belong, to this unique organisation. The Union was the writer's full-time employer, giving him a job description and setting him tasks. But, at the same time, the Union provides its members and their families with social and medical benefits of a quality that places them instantly in the upper middle class of Soviet society.' John and Carol Garrard, *op. cit.*, 107.

⁸⁸ Norman Manea, *On Clowns, The Dictator and the Artist* (New York: Grove Weidenfeld, 1992).

⁸⁹ 'It is no surprise that the Union can not only generate vast quantities of approved prose and verse; it can also recruit many writers to its standard. The Union dominates the Soviet literary scene to such an extent that it has become self-generating; that is it attracts a certain type of member. Former Soviet Philosopher Alexander Zinovyev has tried to correct the mistaken Western view of the typical Soviet writer as a talented individualist struggling to publish dissident works against the efforts of the evil authorities. In fact, he says, most writers are eager to become part of the system: "People of a certain type want to be writers. They are all products of the same kind of education and upbringing. They live and function according to standard Soviet conditions, that is, according to the laws of large congregations of people. They are an integral part of the Soviet social structure with its hierarchy of social positions, its distribution of privileges according to rank, and so forth... They are part of the Party's ideological apparatus."', John and Carol Garrard, *op. cit.*, 185-186.

leading to the appearance of a number of distinct categories among artists. The official abrupt re-orientation towards a neo-Stalinist form of cultural policy rendered even more visible the contrasts between artists. Although by now it had been understood that an artist could not exist outside the Union, the degree of acceptance of the new cultural policy varied widely.

There was a first category of artists who willingly accepted the new direction in which art was moving and tried to take advantage of it following the process of reconfiguration of the artistic field. This category was named by the Romanian art historian, Magda Cârneci, the 'conformists'.⁹⁰ These were not normally big names in the Romanian artistic community and were people who had held positions with the Union before, but whose voices had not gained currency as a distinct group until the regime re-oriented itself towards a mixture of Stalinism and nationalism. They supplied the largest number of works at official exhibitions at the request of the Union leadership and usually in return for significant material advantages. They were the Union's 'mercenaries'.⁹¹

The second category, that of 'false conformists/false non-conformists'⁹², was that of usually ambitious young artists who became known in and had tasted the advantages of the liberalisation period. In effect, they wanted to preserve the positions they had reached in the previous period, and, as a consequence, became ambiguous producers of art, contributing to official exhibitions while also producing independent art that was displayed at personal exhibitions and appreciated by the artistic community.⁹³ The overlap between their official and their individual art production had consequences for both fields. In their works for official exhibitions they usually applied methods experimented with in their personal enterprises, which sometimes brought a note of freshness and modernism to the official trend (see Chapter 5 for a discussion of this phenomenon). Given the prestige gained from personal

⁹⁰ Magda Cârneci, *op. cit.*, 107.

⁹¹ Sorin Alexandrescu, 'Une culture de l'interstice', *Les Temps modernes*, January 1990.

⁹² Magda Cârneci, *op. cit.*, 108.

⁹³ Lucia Dragomir, 'L'écrivain roumain entre vie publique et vie privée à l'époque communiste', *Studia Politica, Romanian Political Studies Review*, Vol. II, No. 2, 2002.

exhibitions and their good connections within the bureaucratic system, this slightly atypical form of official production was accepted by the cultural activists, who were probably proud to count established names among the Party devotees. On the other hand, artists who fell into this category claimed for themselves the role of negotiators between those in power and the artists of the Union. In light of the disputes between Party ideologues and members of the Romanian Writers' Union, which in the 1980s culminated in the de facto non-existence of the Romanian Writers' Union as a functioning association, after 1989 the artists in this second category justified their position under communism as an attempt to maintain dialogue between the Party and the UAP and avoid a similar fate for the UAP as suffered by the Writer's Union.⁹⁴ They were – in Sorin Alexandrescu's words – the 'merchants'⁹⁵ – those who traded profitably, both for themselves and for the Union.

The third category was composed of those who kept themselves as far away as possible from the political pole. These were the 'non-conformists',⁹⁶ those who did not contribute to official art, or, where they did, their production was as neutral as possible (a historical figure, a vaguely industrial landscape, etc.). They were not so isolated within the Union, however, that they did not exhibit, win awards or travel abroad. They enjoyed professional and cordial relationships (by belonging to the same generation) with some of the artists within the second category, as well as a moral ascendancy that allowed them to negotiate their positions – this time with the leadership of the Union. Sorin Alexandrescu named them 'the monks', and this term is well chosen, at least in terms of their determination not to give up their beliefs.⁹⁷

⁹⁴ Similar arguments were circulated by intellectuals in the Soviet Union in order to justify their collaboration with the Soviet leadership. See, for example, Vera Tolz, *Russian Academicians and the Revolution, Combining Professionalism and Politics* (London: Macmillan in association with CREES, University of Birmingham, 1997), 179ff; Vladimir Shlapentokh who mentions the intellectuals' explanation of their position: 'A considerable number of intellectuals actively used as justification of their conformist behavior the idea that each nonconformist act provokes the leadership, which eagerly awaits any excuse to crack down on the intellectuals'. He labels this attitude as 'Don't Tease the Bosses', Vladimir Shlapentokh, *Soviet Intellectuals and Political Power The Post-Stalin Era* (Princeton, New Jersey: Princeton University Press, 1990), 97.

⁹⁵ Sorin Alexandrescu, *op. cit.*

⁹⁶ Magda Cârneci, *op. cit.*, 109.

⁹⁷ Sorin Alexandrescu, *op. cit.*

The Romanian Artists' Union was one of the many organisations and institutions involved in the production of painted representations of Ceaușescu. It functioned as a buffer zone between the political organisations in charge of staging thematic exhibitions and commissioning visual representations of Ceaușescu and the rank-and-file members of the Union, who were expected to respond to the State's demands. A particular type of relationship gradually was established between the Union and those organisations based both on coercive measures applied from above and mutual interests. Given the scarcity of resources and the fact that the State was the only party able to commission works (through subordinated institutions designed to handle the resources), the Union was gradually forced to accept the rules of the game established by the State. The internal debates and complaints are only an indicator of the tense relationships that existed between the Union and the State. The leadership's conciliatory tone on most of the issues speaks instead of an attitude of acceptance of the *status quo*, of adaptation and compromise.

Although archival materials showing the precise process of realisation used in paintings of Ceaușescu are yet to be made available, by highlighting the relationships between beneficiaries and the UAP, between the leadership and the rank-and-file members of the Union, as well as the various mechanisms employed to force artists to produce committed works of art, we are able to gain a certain amount of insight into the general atmosphere in the Union and the coercive means used by State apparatchiks.

Miklós Haraszti uses a similar differentiation when he speaks about the categories of art produced during communism seen from the point of view of political power: 'The liberalization that followed the upheaval of the mid-1950s saw the creation of three distinct categories: *prohibited*, *tolerated*, and *supported* art.' Miklós Haraszti. *op. cit.*, 138.

4. Discourse on National Art: ‘National’ between Tradition and Ideology or how Art Criticism Shaped National Art

The principle involved here is that the centre of power is identical with the centre of truth.[...] It is a world of appearances trying to pass for reality.

-Vaclav Havel, *The Power of the Powerless* –

In chapter 2 we have seen the role that the discourse on nation played in the shaping of the cultural policy and in the articulation of Ceaușescu’s personal dictatorship. Mixed with the Marxist-Leninist rhetoric about re-education, new man, militant art and so on, the discourse on nation became the all-encompassing tissue that fed Romanian communism for a long time, gradually superseding the Marxist-Leninist discourse. Whilst it penetrated and encroached upon fields where previously Marxist-Leninist theory was customary – such as industrialisation or collective agricultural practices – it had the most far-reaching effects on the humanist disciplines. History was undoubtedly the most affected branch as it was savagely and unreasonably employed in order to construct Ceaușescu’s personal image and to confer on him the desired place within the national pantheon.¹ The literary field was deformed as well by the massive intrusion of the nationalist discourse, especially in

¹ For an analysis of the ways in which the discipline of History was affected by the intervention of the communist power see Alexandru Zub, *Orizont închis, Istoriografia română sub comunism* (Iași: Institutul European, 2000). For the same topic in the fields of philosophy and sociology see Vladimir Tismăneanu, ‘Academia Ștefan Gheorghiu și formele corupției ideologice’, in *Arheologia terorii* (București: Ed. Eminescu, 1992).

its protochronist guise.² The profuse sub-chapter of encomiastic literature devoted to Ceaușescu was powerfully infused by the nationalist discourse too.³ In comparison with the aforementioned disciplines, the field of art was far less touched by the employment of nationalism as an ideological tool. It nevertheless contributed to the orchestration of the official nationalist discourse by producing both works of art that illustrated/praised the 'nation' and theoretical writings dealing with the notion of 'national art'.

This chapter takes further the investigation of the discourse on nation by exploring the forms that this discourse took within the field of art creation. As the portrayal of Ceaușescu as a national hero, the father/son of the nation, connected with the people was the core of his public image, it is important to see to what extent the discourse on nation in the field of art paralleled, imitated the nationalist discourse elaborated and promoted by the political leadership. The analysis of the notion of 'national art' will follow two lines. First, we will focus on the investigation of the ways in which this notion was elaborated and dealt with in the speeches and writings of Ceaușescu. As we have seen in chapter 2, the transformation of the nationalist discourse into an official one was the initiative of the new political regime when it came to power in the middle of the sixties. Therefore, it is interesting to see how the notion of 'national art' was treated by Ceaușescu himself, which were the aspects on which he focused when he delivered his definition of 'national art'. Secondly, we will explore the ways in which the notion of 'national art' was treated by professionals, namely artists, art critics and art historians. The professionals put forward more refined definitions and approached the topic from more diverse angles. They revived and circulated themes and concepts that had been employed during the interwar period or focused on matters of style and technique when they tried to define the notion of 'national art'. While the professionals drew upon topics that had been first

² Katherine Verdery, *National Ideology Under Socialism, Identity and Cultural Politics in Ceaușescu's Romania* (Berkeley/Los Angeles/Oxford: University of California Press, 1991), 167-214.

³ Eugen Negrici, *Poezia unei religii politice. Patru decenii de agitație și propagandă* (București: Ed. Pro, n.y.) and *Literature and Propaganda in Communist Romania* (Bucharest: The Romanian Cultural Foundation Publishing House, 1999), 80-101.

addressed by Ceaușescu or even took over *mot-à-mot* the Romanian leader's formulations, they offered in the end more complex definitions of the 'national art'. The exploration of these definitions and of the rhetoric used by professionals gives us the necessary key to decipher that (numerous) part of Ceaușescu's iconography that dealt with the representation of the leader as a national hero or depicted his relationship to the people.

4.1. Ceaușescu and the Definition of 'National Art'

The process of defining national art was tightly linked with the ideologically constructed discourse on nation. The nationalist discourse, that idealised by exclusion and/or reinterpretation of historical data, a unitary nation in terms of its historic past, ethnic constituents or prospective goals was duplicated by a plea for a unitary art. Furthermore, this unitary art was not to be all-encompassing, open to all trends and fashions, but focused on the art produced according to the Marxist-Leninist principles and propping nationalist ideals. Given this peculiar mixture of criteria, the appropriation of past artistic styles or personalities resulted in a rather uneven concoction, in which sometimes very disparate tendencies were to be accommodated.⁴

Nicolae Ceaușescu dealt a lot with the notion of 'nation'. His statements on this were addressing primarily the issues of national sovereignty and the glorious past of

⁴ The process described above echoed vaguely the theoretical stances of Lunacharskii or Lenin, who advocated openness towards past humanist culture, regardless of the fact that it was produced 'under the yoke of capitalism' (Lenin). While the appropriation of past culture in the Soviet Union – or at least in the theoretical statements of the two leaders mentioned above – was supposed to take place naturally and borrowings and adaptations were not aimed at a denial of sources, the theoretical approach to the issue in Romania was rather different. Not only that the takings over were not regarded as part of a different tradition and acknowledged as such, but they were exposed to a process of rewriting/reinterpretation which distorted in most cases their initial meaning. In other words, whereas the process of appropriation according to the Soviet leaders mentioned above was rather a linear process, what happened in Romania was a process of cleaning first, extirpating the noxious traits, retelling the story and just after that incorporating that respective trend/artist in the official narrative. For Lenin's and Lunacharskii's statements regarding the incorporation of past art creation see Catherine Cooke, 'Socialist Realist architecture: theory and practice', in Matthew Cullerne Bown and Brandon Taylor (eds.), *Art of the Soviets, Painting, sculpture and architecture in a one-party state, 1917-1992* (Manchester and New York: Manchester University Press, 1993), 89.

the Romanian people. The same type of rhetoric was transposed into the field of art and the result was a rather generalised and vague treatment of the problem of national art. His limited interest in matters of art creation, as well as his lack of elementary artistic training or genuine curiosity towards this sphere complicated things further and the general impression given by his comments on art is that he simply saw art as an efficient means of propaganda. Nevertheless, he spoke on a few occasions on art, especially at the beginning of his rule when he was attempting to coax intellectuals into joining his markedly nationalist policy. What follows is an attempt to make sense of these disparate and rather vague declarations on national art.

The first clear signal for the reintroduction of the issue of national art appeared no later than 1965, in the Central Committee's report to the IXth Congress of the Romanian Communist Party. As we have seen in chapter 2, this Congress was a cornerstone for the nationalist politics promoted by the Ceaușescu regime, as it marked a vigorous retaking of and open circulation of the theme of 'nation'. Apart from a stronger focus on political and economic independence, Ceaușescu drew extensively on national history, Romania's desired role in the world and the need for national consensus for the achievement of this goal. A special part was devoted to the requirement that this orientation be reflected in art creation as well. Ceaușescu called for an art whose focus should be the Romanian people and its historical past as well as its achievements towards the construction of communism:

There are many important moments in the history of our motherland, in the tumultuous work of our people for the edification of the new society, which have not found yet a full reflection in the literary and artistic works. Only by approaching the themes of liberation of our people, of the deep revolutionary transformations in Romania, that of social relationships and of the spiritual life of our people, reflecting the optimism and vigor of our people - in their total amplitude and complexity, with great artistic skills - can our talented creators accomplish works that will remain in the patrimony of the national and universal culture. Reflecting the politics and the activity of our Party

devoted to the development of our motherland, to the welfare of our people, to man's happiness, the literary-artistic creation ought to be permeated with a profound socialist humanism.⁵

In spite of statements – a few lines below in his report – that drew upon the liberty of creation and exchange of ideas between Romanian artists and international ones,⁶ Ceaușescu delivered in fact a very restrictive definition of art creation in his first important public speech. He focused exclusively on themes that encompassed the idea of nation in its revolutionary development ('liberation of our people', 'the deep revolutionary transformations in Romania') or in its traditionally defining characteristics ('the spiritual life of our people', 'the optimism and vigor of our people'). This mixture between concrete themes (historical themes) and those dealing with rather ineffable features (optimism, vigor, etc) was a constant characteristic of Ceaușescu's discourse on nation, proving that it was more traditional in its essence than the rhetoric on progress and socialist development would let us believe at a first glance. It echoed inter-war or, even more, nineteenth century ways of defining the Romanian 'nation', when concrete episodes from Romanian history were explored not as simple historical events, but in order to highlight certain positive features of the Romanian people too.⁷

⁵ 'Report of the CC of the RCP to the IXth Congress of the Party', in Nicolae Ceaușescu, *Opere alese*, Vol. I, 1965-1970 (București: Ed. Politică, 1982), 77.

⁶ 'The progress of the socialist culture bases itself on the knowledge and appropriation of all that is advanced in the art and culture of the world, on the large development of the exchange of spiritual values between peoples. It is also necessary that links with the men of culture and art from the socialist countries, as well as from the other countries, be intensified, that conditions for a permanent contact with the cultural contemporary life and for a more active manifestation of our country within the concert of the universal culture and art, be assured. This does not imply though an uncritical attitude towards everything that comes from abroad, yet, on the contrary, calls for discernment, own judging in the appreciation of the artistic creation and of the works of art.', *Ibid*, 78.

⁷ Ceaușescu's predilection for a rather romantic definition of nation, as well as for the militant type of artist is proved by his love for the 1848 generation of revolutionary poets or for the militant art produced immediately after 1945: '...Ceaușescu had a reduced level of culture [...] his cultural universe confined itself to patriotic poetry (Bolintineanu, Eminescu, Coșbuc) to odes and hymns of glory, to a few *românțe* [melancholic songs] and many movies with revolutionary content.', Silviu Curticeanu, *op. cit.*, 99. See also Dumitru Popescu, *op. cit.*, 302 and Silviu Brucan, *Generația irosită, Memorii* (București: Ed. Univers & Calistrat Hogaș, 1992), 129.

Another interesting shift of accent in Ceaușescu's 1965 speech was the importance given to the Romanian people at the expense of the working class who had been until then the customary point of reference. The oscillation between 'people' and 'working class' and their interchangeable employment was the first sign of what would become in time a gradual absorption of the 'working class' into the 'people' and of the latter predominant position in the official discourse. Furthermore, Ceaușescu identified the 'people' both as sources of inspiration and beneficiaries of the national art:

History shows that the great men of culture, the true artists have always expressed in their works the reality of their time, they have been close to the people. [...] Even more now, the art creators of the socialist society must identify themselves with the aspirations of the working class, they have to serve the great aim of achieving a happier life for the entire people. [...] To the people, the true creator of all riches of our motherland, must men of art and culture devote all that they can create more beautiful and better.⁸

The shift of accent from the 'working class' to the 'people' altered as well the visual discourse, which was less focused on typological representations according to the socialist realist aesthetics ('the worker', 'the peasant', etc), but on the depiction of the Romanian people as a whole and of its stage of political and economic development. Within Ceaușescu's iconography the image of the 'people' became a recurrent motif at the expense of representing the Romanian leader in the company of different social classes. Even when workers or peasants could be easily identified in the paintings devoted to Ceaușescu, they were not depicted there as representatives of their social class but as parts of the larger and more important community which was the Romanian people. Ceaușescu did not try to establish a special link with either of the 'revolutionary' social classes but with the Romanian people at large. Therefore, the motif 'Ceaușescu-The People' emerged as one of the most important themes of his iconography, always constructed as an indestructible

⁸ 'Report of the CC of the RCP to the IXth Congress of the Party', in Nicolae Ceaușescu, *Opere alese*, Vol. I, 1965-1970 (București: Ed. Politică, 1982), 76-77.

pair between the leader and the led. It was represented either as a constitutive part of a larger theme (a 'work visit' or a 'fight for peace') or as an independent work whose only focus was the depiction of the relationship that existed between Ceaușescu and the people. One of the works that deals with this relationship within a 'work visit' theme is *Omagiu* by Constantin Nițescu⁹ (Figure 5). The presidential couple is represented during the welcome moment, while people warmly greet them and they respond to their salute. The persons depicted around the Ceaușescus wear easily identifiable outfits; they belong to well-defined social and professional categories: workers, miners, peasants, pioneers, etc. In spite of this effortless identification of the social and professional categories represented in the painting, their depiction does not emphasise any of them as an isolated group; none of them stands out in a particular way. They are only represented there as constitutive parts of the Romanian people, as components of a larger and more important community, namely the Romanian people. In point of fact, the care of the propaganda apparatus to underline the relationship between Ceaușescu and the people manifested within the work visits organised in factories, mines, agricultural fields, and so on. Even when a work visit had a very well circumscribed purpose (for instance, the visit of a factory and a meeting with the people who worked there), large crowds of pioneers, peasants or soldiers were brought to welcome the presidential couple. The news-reels and the photographs published afterwards in the journals always emphasised this image of Ceaușescu: a beloved leader who connects easily with his people wherever he goes in the country. It was sometimes difficult to say, by looking only at the photographs published in newspapers, where exactly the visit took place; the welcome scenarios were pretty much the same, following the same steps and aiming at underlining the same bond between the leader and his led.

A different scheme is employed by Vasile Pop Negreșteanu¹⁰ (PLATE 7). The artist attempts to depict the same relationship between the leader and his people, although the visual scheme and the style he uses make the relationship look colder, more

⁹ Constantin Nițescu, *Omagiu* (Homage), 1980.

¹⁰ Vasile Pop Negreșteanu, *Compoziție cu Nicolae Ceaușescu și Elena Ceaușescu* (Composition with Nicolae Ceaușescu and Elena Ceaușescu), 1987.

distant than the one described in the previous painting. As in most of Negreşteanu's works depicting the Ceauşescus, the relationship between the leader and his people is rather one of veneration and gratitude than of genuine love and friendship. The Ceauşescus are represented in the centre of the image, well individualised through their size and projection against a mono-coloured surface. The presidential couple's simple, un-decorated outfits and the converging gazes and moves of the people towards them further lay emphasis on their centrality within the image. The figures represented on the left and the right sides of the Ceauşescus are again representatives of different social and professional categories. They are peasants, miners, pioneers, white-collar workers, etc. The painting gives the impression of a complete inventory of these categories as the artist depicts both the man and the woman of a category. We can see the peasant woman along with her counter-part, the peasant man, or the white-collar man and woman grouped together. Their outfits are rendered very carefully, down to the smallest detail, as if the painter aims at portraying the standard peasant, worker, etc. Negreşteanu's composition and manner also contribute to an immediate identification of the figures represented around Ceauşescu. His graphic, flat style that emphasises the contours of the silhouettes and his obsession with representing them aligned, one after the other, as if they are on show, make the viewer instantly grasp the idea that the painting tries to convey: the relationship between Ceauşescu and the Romanian people with all its diversity but joint love toward its leader.

In 1968, at the National Conference of the Romanian Artists' Union – the first Ceauşescu attended in his capacity as the General Secretary of the Party – the Romanian leader picked up the issue of national art within a larger discussion on art production, freedom of creation, diversity of styles. He initially stressed that 'each artist in his own manner, within his own style should render the unity of ideas that dominates today our socialist society...'¹¹ The freedom of creation being

¹¹ ASB, *fond* 2239, UAP, File 14/1968, 357. These lines resemble very much those enounced by Zhdanov in his speech at the First Congress of the Union of the Soviet Writers in 1934: 'Socialist Realism guarantees the creative artist exceptional opportunities for the manifestation of his creative initiative, for the choice of various forms, styles and genres.', in Geoffrey Hosking, *Beyond Socialist*

declamatorily hailed, Ceaușescu nevertheless highlighted that artists had certain duties towards the Party and the Nation, which should be accomplished within the framework designed by the Party ideology. The 'unity of ideas' was only an euphemism for expected conformity and compliance to the ideological requests. Even more important were Ceaușescu's comments on the works of art he had seen in the exhibition open on the occasion of the Conference:

I could admire on this occasion works of art of highly artistic quality, inspired from the past and the present of our people, from the natural beauties of our motherland, valuable works due to all generations of Romanian artists.¹²

His enumeration is very telling both for his personal taste and the place he accorded to each theme, as well as for the artistic production in 1968. Unfortunately we could not find the catalogue of this exhibition and tell for certain that the works of art devoted to 'the past ...of our people' were indeed the most numerous. It is very possible that such an exhibition, for which the works of art were supposedly carefully selected would have encompassed a significant number of works dealing with historical subjects. If this hypothesis were true, it would prove that artistic production in 1968 was already oriented towards this topic, that artists were already open towards and willing to approach it and that, in general, Ceaușescu's request did not fall on a virgin soil.¹³ Furthermore, it would prove that within this process of reconsidering and giving impetus to the notions of 'nation' and 'national art', the two parties involved, the political leadership and the intellectuals – to use large denominative terms – played equally important roles, that initiatives were taken on

Realism, Soviet Fiction since Ivan Denisovich (New York: Holmes and Meier Publishers, Inc., 1980), 3.

¹² Nicolae Ceaușescu, 'Speech at the National Conference of the Romanian Artists' Union', April 18, 1968, *Scînteia*, 18 April 1968, 3.

¹³ An indirect proof for this assumption could be a text from 1969, signed by the art historian Dan Grigorescu, an assessment of the art production of the previous years. One particular passage refers to the painting of historical inspiration: 'One can notice, especially in the last few years, a preponderance of compositions with historical themes in comparison with those inspired by the contemporary reality. This fact is to a great extent natural: it is a reaction to a certain period in which both history and contemporary reality were commented upon artistically in a declamatory fashion. [The present period] is a return to a simple and authentic humanity. On the other hand, it is the consequence of a more precise knowledge of our history, of its long filtration in our consciousness.', Dan Grigorescu, 'Retrospectivă', *Arta* 7, 1969, 7.

both sides, that, finally, this 'successful story' was the outcome of converging forces. But even though the hypothesis was not correct and the works devoted to the past were not that many, it is very important that Ceaușescu spotted precisely those works, that he was receptive to those rather than other topics. His singling out of this type of works or reinforcement of an already existing reality was, without any doubt, an important guiding line for artists and art critics.

Within the same speech he made a more explicit reference to 'past figures', who were supposed to become, along with the 'great moments' of the Romanian history, constant sources of inspiration for the artists. The passage began with a clear reference to the Marxist-Leninist philosophy, on which the entire artistic process purportedly had to be grounded. But Ceaușescu quickly shifted from an in-depth discussion of Marxism-Leninism to the need that the socialist artist completely identifies with his/her people and epoch, a fact that was considered as the salient characteristic of the above mentioned philosophy. Within this context, he went on by stressing the 'social responsibility' of the socialist artist whose main purpose would be to render adequately the 'aspirations and interests of his/her people'. Furthermore, he reordered the main themes that had to be addressed by artists according to his profound nationalist ideology:

The common denominator of our socialist art is the Marxist-Leninist philosophical conception, the ideal of high social responsibility of the socialist artist. It is already common knowledge that the distinctive sign of great art has always been and continues to be the conveying of the noblest aspirations of mankind, the identification of the artist with the most progressive, most revolutionary ideals of the epoch in which he/she lives and works, with the aspirations and interests of his/her people, to whom he/she has to devote his/her entire existence and talent. [...] Art is destined to adorn life, to render the beauties of nature, the great moments and figures of the past and the realities of the present society.¹⁴

¹⁴ Nicolae Ceaușescu, 'Speech at the National Conference of the Romanian Artists' Union', April 18, 1968 (*Scinteia*, 18 April 1968), 3.

His speech seems to have had the desired impact as the resolution of the National Conference of the UAP proves. The final conclusions of the Conference encompass in a concentrated form all the ideas scattered in Ceaușescu's speech. They emphasised the need that a Romanian Art School develop and they brought into the open themes such as 'the soul and virtues of our people' and 'the spiritual universe of the Romanian people'. As we will see further, the focus on these themes was the main contribution of the Romanian art critics and artists, who offered in this way more refined definitions of Romanian national art or Romanianness in general:

The conference calls all artists to devote their energy and talent towards a creation that would reflect both themselves and the realities of the contemporary life, the ideals of the socialist society, the soul and virtues of our people; to contribute fully to the delineation and affirmation of the Romanian Art School, of the Romanian spirit, of our national dignity. [...] to reflect in their works the significance of the great events from the fighting past of our people and of today's achievements [...] to promote the creation in which the spiritual universe of the Romanian people finds itself a convincing representation.¹⁵

Ceaușescu dealt with national art in more oblique forms too. Without explicitly using the word 'national' in some passages, he stressed nevertheless the need for an art that would reflect the 'aspirations' of the working class. In addition, this art should have as the main addressee the working class. In other words, it had to be appealing and understandable for a large, middlebrow public. This meant – strictly speaking in terms of art production – a predilection for certain topics as well as a

At the General Meeting of the Writers, that took place the same year, Ceaușescu referred to specific historical moments (the Union of 1918 from which fifty years had passed) as a source of inspiration for artists in general: 'The forthcoming period will be marked by a series of anniversaries and political events of great significance in the life of our party. These events offer to the creators of art and culture topics for works of great artistic value...', Nicolae Ceaușescu, *Speech at the General Meeting of the Writers' Union*, November 16, 1968 (Bucharest: Ed. Politică, 1968), 12. A similar rhetoric was employed within the General Meeting of the Composers' and Musicologists' Union that took place in 1968. See for this Nicolae Ceaușescu, *Speech at the General Meeting of the Composers' and Musicologists' Union*, December 13, 1968 (Bucharest: Ed. Politică, 1968).

¹⁵ 'The Resolution of the National Conference of the Romanian Artists' Union', *Arta*, 4/1968.

lowering of themes' complexity, preference for certain styles and techniques and disregard or marginalisation of others, prohibition of certain visual devices labeled as experimentalist, unintelligible, fashionable or plainly imitations of Western trends. Therefore, the accent put on an art produced for the working class denied/overshadowed the validity of visual solutions of Western influence and promoted an art inspired by local/national reality. Furthermore, by a strict demarcation of the art's audience and by the inclusion of intellectuals in the larger category of the working class, Ceaușescu aimed at the establishment of an undifferentiated public, at a 'nationwide consensus' as far as tastes and art production in Romania were concerned:

We want art and literature to serve the people, that works of literature and art be produced for workers, for peasants and intellectuals, for all working classes. We are for diversity of styles and forms in the literary and artistic creation. But as we have said before, the conception, the ideology must be one and only – the ideology and the revolutionary conception of the working class. Art must serve a single purpose: the socialist and communist education. In this sense, we are for the widest liberty of creation, for the widest expression of imagination, but in the spirit of our conception.¹⁶

A few years later, at the 1st Congress of Political Education and Socialist Culture, in 1976, Ceaușescu became more specific in outlining what Romanian art works should *not* be. In general, after 1971, his speeches abandoned the conciliatory, tolerant tone (that allowed the awkward juxtaposition in the same phrases of syntagmas such as 'diversity of styles' and 'the ideology [...] of the working class') and focused more on the negative, restrictive features:

The artistic creation, whose base is the materialist dialectic, revolutionary philosophy regarding the world, ought to be inspired by the social-historical reality from which it emerges, because it is incompatible with becoming estranged from life, with purposeless and gratuity, with the so-called

¹⁶ Nicolae Ceaușescu, *Arta* 8, 1971.

principle of art for art's sake, refuted by the entire development of the universal culture [...].¹⁷

Ceaușescu's Speech at the 1st Congress for Political Education and Socialist Culture was probably the most important ideological document issued after the July Theses in 1971. It reiterated the main points of the July Theses and called for a wider and more efficient putting into practice of the measures of forming the new man. The speech was adopted as the official program for the future ideological and cultural activities and became a cornerstone for the cultural policy in Romania from that moment on.¹⁸ In the field of fine arts, it led to the restatement of the need for a more applied 'political, ideological, ethical and aesthetical education' of the members of the UAP, a more 'exigent' attitude regarding the ideological orientation of the Union's members, increased vigilance towards the admission of new members, etc. As far as the issue of 'national art' was concerned, it was touched concisely and it encompassed the two already identified dimensions – the illustration of the past and of the socialist reality:

The UAP will assure the mobilisation of the most valuable creators for the creation of works of art devoted to the great moments and figures of the history of our people, to the constructors of the multilaterally developed socialist society.¹⁹

¹⁷ Nicolae Ceaușescu, 'Speech regarding the political-ideological and cultural-educative activity for the formation of the new man, conscious and committed constructor of the multilaterally developed socialist society and of communism in Romania', presented at the 1st Congress for Political Education and Socialist Culture, June 2, 1976, *Arta*, 2-3, 1976, 2.

¹⁸ 'The Congress for Political Education and Socialist Culture, appreciating the highly ideological, theoretical and political value of Comrade Nicolae Ceaușescu's speech, which illustrates the great revolutionary transformations that have taken place within the structure of our society and towards the education of the masses [...] appropriates fully the content of this document of maximum importance for the life of our motherland and our people. The Congress adopts the speech of Comrade Nicolae Ceaușescu as the Program of the entire future activity of our party and state, of all mass organisations, of educational and cultural-artistic organisations, of our entire people...', *Ibid*, 5.

¹⁹ 'Program of measures for the implementation of the decisions of the XIth Congress of the RCP and of the Congress of Political Education and Socialist Culture in the field of ideological, political and cultural-educational work', *Arta* 6, 1976, 2.

The nationalist representation of socialist reality had more than one component. The most obvious one was the depiction of the transformations through which the country had passed after the inauguration of communism in Romania and especially after 1965, the year when Ceaușescu came to power. The achievements of the socialist epoch should be the focus of art creation as they illustrated both the new (industrial) face of Romania and its new status as an economically independent and self-governed state. In connection with this, the representation of the socialist reality should include the people's enthusiastic response towards the Party's policies concerned with the rapid industrialisation of the country:

The achievements and the present preoccupations of the socialist Romania, the work of building up the multilaterally developed socialist society, the heroism with which the entire people carries out our Party's politics, all these are without any doubt rich and inexhaustible sources of inspiration. I am convinced that you would strive to make use of this rich material, to portray this powerful mass enthusiasm.²⁰

We have here an interesting connection between the promotion of nationalism, national art and representation of the enthusiasm towards the leader. As we have seen in the previous chapters, the identification of Ceaușescu with the Party became almost complete over the years. Through diverse techniques (he was the one who always read the Party's reports and programs, Party's documents were published under his signature, letters of support towards the Party's policies were addressed to Ceaușescu, etc), his figure identified with the Party, he was both the initiator and guarantor of the Party's politics. This strange link was manifest in his visual representations as well. A substantial part of the paintings depicting Ceaușescu deal - directly or indirectly - with this popular enthusiasm. Specific themes (such as 'work visits', 'Ceaușescu - the children's friend', etc) were employed as a visual support for conveying the mass enthusiasm towards Ceaușescu. The fact that he

²⁰ Nicolae Ceaușescu, 'Speech at the meeting with the delegates at the National Conference of the Romanian Artists' Union, delivered on the occasion of his visiting of the exhibition '125 Years from the Revolution of 1848 in Romania'', *Arta* 6, 1973.

referred – within the context of national art - to the representation of people's support and enthusiasm towards the Party as to a theme that had to catch the artists' attention is very important for a better mapping of the ways in which Ceaușescu influenced his own visual representation. This is not to say that this passage alone (or similar passages dealing with the notion of 'national art') leads automatically to the above conclusion. But if we put together Ceaușescu's statements on national art, his strongly delineated public image as the head of the Party and the State, his recurrent pleas for the representation of popular enthusiasm, his penchant towards mass adulation, we have then a more complete picture of the twisted ways in which his image was shaped.

Additionally, the context in which this particular passage was delivered is very telling. First of all, the passage is part of Ceaușescu's speech delivered before the delegates at the National Conference of the Romanian Artists' Union. This meant participants at that meeting were members of the Union's leadership, both from Bucharest and the provinces and who had the decisional power to put into practice Ceaușescu's requests. Secondly, the speech was occasioned by the exhibition that he had just visited: '125 Years since the Revolution of 1848 in Romania'. It was a fairly common practice that any exhibition dealing with a historical topic encompasses also works devoted to contemporary Romania, to the glorious epoch that fulfilled completely the ideals expressed, but usually not fully accomplished in the past. Therefore, the constant fluctuation in Ceaușescu's speech between the event commemorated and the contemporary reality corresponded to the economy of the exhibition itself. What is rather extraordinary is his insistence on the depiction of the popular enthusiasm, a theme that, to our knowledge, appears now for the first time in a speech that commented on an exhibition. The topic in itself was not new if we think only about the 'July Theses'. It was dealt with there only generally when Ceaușescu referred to the need to produce an art that would induce feelings of popular enthusiasm towards the Party. At the 1973 National Conference of the Romanian Artists' Union, Ceaușescu changed the focus and spoke about the need to represent this popular enthusiasm in works of art.

In the field of fine arts, the enthusiasm towards the Party was more difficult to convey than in other forms of art in which words were used (poetry, cinema, etc). Artists frequently employed symbols that made reference to the Party in an obvious way (red flags, the Communist Party's symbols, etc) but apart from this, it was rather difficult to represent visually the enthusiasm of the people toward the Party. Gradually, the enthusiasm that was supposed to be directed towards the Party was channeled in the direction of Ceaușescu. As he was the main actor in the Party Congresses, the one who delivered the Party documents and under whose signature these documents were published, the Romanian leader became the most important person in the Party. Therefore, Ceaușescu became the main focus of the artists' interest whenever they wanted to represent the Romanian people's enthusiasm towards the Party and its leadership. Paintings depicting Ceaușescu flanked by people who showed their love and enthusiasm towards their leader started to emerge and they gradually formed an independent motif, without explicit references to the Party. One of the paintings that dealt with the representation of the enthusiasm towards Ceaușescu as an autonomous theme was the piece entitled *Omagiu* by Nicolae Constantin²¹ (PLATE 8). The scheme that the painter used in order to depict the people's enthusiasm towards its leader was that of literally representing Ceaușescu in the middle of men, women and children who acclaimed him. Ceaușescu is in the centre of the image and all bodies and gazes converge towards him. He is not represented isolated in the middle of the image as it happens in most of the representations of this type, but screened by the people's bodies which form a sort of circle around him. He is slightly over-dimensioned as compared with the other figures in the painting but, in spite of this, he is still connected with the people. Regardless of the outside look of Ceaușescu, there is a feeling that the leader and the led interact, that the people bestow its love and gratitude upon Ceaușescu and that he responds to their affection. However, Ceaușescu does not establish relationships with any of them as individuals but with all of them as a group, as the people. The same scheme of representing the people that we have previously seen is

²¹ Nicolae Constantin, *Omagiu* (Homage), 1978.

employed in this work as well: easily recognizable social and professional categories (peasants, workers, soldiers, pioneers, etc) are depicted as representatives of the people as a whole. Another interesting thing about this work is that there is no element within the painting that would help us to identify the moment or the place of the scene depicted. It does not resemble with either of the classical themes of Ceaușescu's iconography (work visit, Ceaușescu-the friend of the people, etc), but it is a sheer depiction of the people's enthusiasm.

A last point is worth discussing here before concluding this section: what was the relationship between national art and socialist realism? To what extent these two notions were overlapping and to what extent socialist realism was still considered a valid method for the art practice in Romania. To start with, it is obvious from the above quotations that Ceaușescu's discourse on national art encompassed many references to notions belonging to the socialist realist rhetoric. He talked about the necessity to create an art for the people that would portray the achievements of the communism era and the heroic past of the Romanian people. He stressed many times the educational role of art, the contribution that art should make towards the construction of the communist man. He also touched upon the optimistic side of art creation, upon the need for art to depict enthusiasm towards the Party's politics as well as the zeal with which the new society was constructed. Although Ceaușescu avoided using the term socialist realism, he employed other syntagmas that practically covered the same notion, for instance socialist humanism or socialist art. Clear references to socialist realism were made in 1971 when the July Theses were launched. More precisely, in a speech that he delivered in November 1971²² and in which he evaluated the main measures taken and the results obtained since the launching of the Theses, Ceausescu defined the terms of realist art and socialist humanism in connection with the classical socialist realism. Practically he tried both to defend and to enlarge the notion of socialist realism by paying closer attention to

²² Nicolae Ceausescu. *Exposition concerning the Program of the RCP, for the improvement of ideological activity, the raising of the general level of socialist knowledge and education of the masses, for the establishing of relationships in our society based on the principles of socialist and communist ethics and justice* (Bucharest: Editura Politică, 1971).

the term socialist humanism which was considered a more adequate method for the stage of development reached by the Romanian socialism. Firstly he opposed the critics of socialist realism:

For some art specialists, socialist realism means the creation of certain clichés, of a unique pattern for the entire art. I consider that this manner of understanding realism is completely wrong [...] When we speak about realist art we think to an art which renders the realities of our country, of the time we are living in, of the epoch of great revolutionary and socialist changes [that we are living in]. Could be conceived an art that would not depict, in the most various forms, these grandiose times? Of course not! Such an art would be lifeless.²³

Secondly he discussed the notion of socialist humanism trying to differentiate it from other forms of humanism:

At the same time, we have to operate some clarifications concerning the notion of socialist humanism, which presupposes a more complex understanding of man in society, considered not as an individual, but as a social man, in strong connection and interdependence with his peers, with the interests of the large masses. Socialist humanism is supposed to render personal happiness in the context of the affirmation of the entire people's personality. Starting from here, art infused by socialist humanism has to be devoted to the large masses, among which the personality does not lose itself, but becomes stronger, along with the affirmation and happiness of our entire nation.²⁴

The two quotations above are not only simple references to socialist realism but they reiterate definitions and themes that had been circulated in the Soviet Union in the period of coalescence of the socialist realist style. For instance, the affirmation of Ceaușescu that socialist art should be devoted to the masses reminds us of

²³ Nicolae Ceaușescu. *Exposition concerning the Program of the RCP...*, 68.

²⁴ *Ibid*, 69.

Lenin's statement that 'art belongs to the people'.²⁵ Similarly, his insistence on the development of the individual only in connection with his countrymen echoes the accent put by the same Soviet leader on the collective spirit of art in general.²⁶ Moreover, Ceaușescu's demand to render the great achievements of the communist period resembles Zhdanov's request '... to depict [life] truthfully in works of art [...] not to depict it [the reality] in a dead, scholastic way, not simply as "objective reality", but to depict reality in its revolutionary development.'²⁷ All these similarities prove that socialist realism, although occasionally referred to, continued to play an important role in the articulation of Ceaușescu's discourse on art. They also prove that there was from the very beginning a congruence and an overlap between socialist realism and national art which was probably best captured by Stalin's definition of socialist realist art: 'national in form, socialist in content'.²⁸ As we have seen in chapter 2, it was far easier to accommodate the nationalist discourse with the Marxist-Leninist doctrine than the former with the Western currents and ideas. When Ceaușescu wanted to contain the wave of liberalisation that became uncontrollable at the beginning of the seventies, he resorted to the rhetoric and practices of socialist realism, maintaining at the same time his nationalist agenda. The issue of the July Theses in 1971 marked the open return to the line of socialist realism in art, to the re-surfacing of the core tenets of socialist realism: mass art, rejection of art for art's sake, New Man, revolutionary impetus, optimism, mobilisation, etc. As far as the heroic past was concerned, references to the need to represent it in the works of art can be found both in the discourse on socialist realist art and in that on national art. There is much in common between Lenin's Plan for Monumental Propaganda and Ceaușescu's requests to have an art that would depict the heroic past of the Romanian people.²⁹ Similarly, Stalin's interest in works of art

²⁵ V. I. Lenin, 'Party Organisation and Party Literature', in *Socialist Realism in Literature and Art, A Collection of Articles* (Moscow: Progress Publishers, 1971), 28.

²⁶ '...literature [...] cannot, in fact, be an individual undertaking...', Ibid, 23

²⁷ Régine Robin, *Socialist Realism. An Impossible Aesthetic* (California: Stanford University Press, 1986), 57.

²⁸ Igor Golomstock, *Totalitarian Art in the Soviet Union, the Third Reich, Fascist Italy and the People's Republic of China* (London: Collins Harvill, 1990), 128.

²⁹ John E. Bowlit, 'Russian Sculpture and Lenin's Plan of Monumental Propaganda', in Henry A. Millon and Linda Nochlin (eds) *Art and Architecture in the Service of Politics* (Cambridge, Massachusetts, and London: The MIT Press, 1980) and Christina Lodder, 'Lenin's Plan for

devoted to the great personalities of Russian history (Ivan the Terrible, Peter the Great) resembles Ceaușescu's demands to honor the *voievozi* and heroes of the national pantheon. The aforementioned parallels demonstrate that there was a big similarity between the classical socialist realist rhetoric and the discourse on national art in Romania. What differed nevertheless was the strong accent put on the depiction of the heroic past in Romania and especially the visual solution found in order to render it. As we shall see below, the use mainly of mediaeval mural painting as a source of inspiration for the historical painting was one of the particularities of the Romanian art of the 1970s and the 1980s, as well as an option that influenced the construction of the Romanian leader's image to a great extent. Whereas the embracing of socialist realism as the *method* that was supposed to be followed in the Soviet Union led to an art that resembled more the XIXth century academism, the accent put on national art in the art production/discourse in Romania brought forward mediaeval patterns (in terms of style, composition, themes, etc) that ultimately modeled the Romanian art of the 1970s and the 1980s in a totally different way.

To conclude this first section, Ceaușescu's definition of 'national art' followed closely his conception about the nation. Denying any diversity as far as nationalities were concerned, it focused on the representation of the nation as a unitary corpus, moving towards the construction of communism. Furthermore, his idea of 'national art' encompassed two main themes: the heroic past of the Romanian people and its achievements on the road of constructing communism in Romania. Whilst the representation of the heroic past of the Romanian people was supposed to bring into the foreground important past moments and especially figures of the national history, the theme of contemporary achievements was to illustrate the high stage of development reached by the Romanian society due to the new socialist order. However, both themes were further used as a background for the developing theme of the leader's image, which ended by being the terminus point for both of them.

Monumental Propaganda', in Matthew Cullerne-Bown and Brandon Taylor (eds) *Art of the Soviets, painting, sculpture and architecture in a one-party state, 1917-1992* (Manchester and New York: Manchester University Press, 1993).

Ceaușescu's image became the most important figure in a lineage of past historical personalities as well as the initiator and guarantor of constructing communism in Romania. Therefore, his conception of 'national art' as well as his statements related to this topic could be considered as influencing elements towards the shaping of his image as the national leader of Romania.

4.2. Art Critics' and Art Historians' Definition of 'National Art'

This section will focus on the analysis of the artists', art critics' and art historians' contribution to defining the concept of 'national art'. Furthermore, it attempts to identify the consequences that this type of discourse had for the artistic creation in general and, in particular, for the way Ceaușescu's image was conceived.

The role played by art critics and art historians within the process of *defining* the notion of 'national art' is not easy to determine. This is because formulae circulated in the political sphere were frequently taken over and cited automatically, with minimal, if any intervention upon them. They were usually used as mandatory quotations when topics related to the representation of 'nation', national symbols or 'national art' were dealt with in *Arta* or in the cultural journals of the time. Therefore, we should make a distinction between this kind of mechanical and un-interventionist dissemination of the formulae employed by the leadership and their critical consideration. On the other hand, even this 'blind' circulation of certain syntagmas was important, as it maintained the topic in attention and gave it weight by simple super-exposure. The communist society - in which discourse was paradoxically both powerless and full of impact - functioned mainly on the basis of discursive 'reality'. Discourse was the tool that modeled/controlled the society and not the other way around. That is why discursive articulations became important, no matter whether they were sincere or not. In other words, intellectuals (backed by ideologists) were those who maintained the illusion that the system was functioning, that what was said at the very top was true and should be supported. In this sense, art critics' and historians' contribution to the dissemination of the nationalistic

discourse and its adaptation to the field of art should be considered as an important one. However, the role played by art critics and historians in defining the concept of 'national art' should not be exaggerated. First of all, it should be said that there was an entire space un-contaminated by the discourse on nation, in which art historians and critics did their job using their specific tools, unrestrained by the ideological framework. Secondly, it is important to note that there were noticeable differences between the ways in which critics and ideologues moved into this space. As mentioned above art critics and historians usually duplicated/echoed the discourse on 'nation' and 'national art' proposed by the leadership. Whilst ideologues' articles were most of the time a mixture of quotations, approval of party's directives and denunciation of practices and ideas in opposition with the main ideological line, art critics' texts encompassed a limited number of mandatory quotations and comments. These comments aimed at refining the wooden statements circulated by ideologues, offering more sophisticated definitions and, most importantly, inserting them in a historical perspective. Therefore, it can be concluded that the main contribution of art critics was towards providing a historical context, trying to define the notion of 'national art' within a historical continuity and accommodating divergent tendencies.

As we have seen in chapter 2, intellectuals initially embraced the topic of nation for it was one with a long and established tradition in Romanian culture.³⁰ Art critics and historians were equally enthusiastic about the topic of national art. After almost two decades of socialist realism they felt eager to focus on the local art tradition and to re-establish the continuity with the pre-war period. This trend was especially supported by the older generation of art critics and historians who, at the end of the sixties, were established authorities in the field. They became the main advocates of an art creation based on the local tradition against a younger generation of critics who were more interested in what was happening in the western art at that time. The

³⁰ A similar idea is expressed by Katherine Verdery who explained in the book cited above the generally supportive response of the Romanian intellectuals to the nationalistic discourse during Ceașescu period as the consequence of a long practice in this direction in the interwar period. See also Mihai Botez, *Intelectualii din Europa de Est, Intelectualii Est-Europeni și statul național comunist, Un punct de vedere românesc* (București: Fundația Culturală Română, 1993).

rift between generations was amplified by the different educational background too. Most of the older critics (George Oprescu, N. Argintescu-Amza, Petre Comarnescu, etc) had been educated before the WWII under the influence of the French, Italian or Anglo-Saxon schools of art criticism which gave a special importance to the idea of national art and tradition. For them, the return to the interwar spirit of national art and local tradition was the most natural thing and, as we shall see below, efforts were made to revive concepts and themes that had been circulated in the interwar period. For the younger generation, entirely or mainly educated during communism, the period of liberalisation in the second half of the sixties meant the open rejection of socialist realism yet not necessarily the re-connection with the interwar period and the return to the idea of national art. They were more eager to connect themselves with the contemporary Western art world and to introduce Romanian artists and public to the recent artistic trends of the Occident. Therefore the fracture between generations was almost inevitable.³¹ As the art critic Magda Cârnelci maintains 'the fracture between the young generation and the rest of the artistic community' reached its peak around 1968 when the 'movement' that denied the experimental tendencies became more vocal.³² This 'movement', backed by elder art critics, favoured the 'tradition of common sense'³³ against experimental exercises. As we shall see further, through this 'tradition of common sense' its supporters understood an organic development of the Romanian art, according to which the main sources of inspiration for the contemporary art production ought to be sought in the art of the past.³⁴ Furthermore, the 'tradition of common sense' implied a sort of moderation, of not breaking the canon, of not making *tabula rasa* of local artistic rules and patterns.

³¹ The same fracture manifested in the field of literary criticism. For instance, when he describes in his volume of memoirs the period between 1966 and 1970, the writer Nicolae Steinhardt speaks about the 'alliance between communists and old people against youth'. He mentions how 'traditional critics castigate the new *onirici* literati with the same fervor as the bosses of socialist realism [did]' Nicolae Steinhardt, *Jurnalul fericirii* (Cluj-Napoca: Dacia, 1991), 346-347.

³² Magda Cârnelci, *Artele plastice în România, 1945-1989* (Bucureşti: Meridiane, 2000), 96.

³³ N. Argintescu-Amza, 'Artistul şi publicul', *Arta Plastică*, 1, 1965, 54.

³⁴ 'In this sense, the promotion of creative talents, the highlighting of 'novelties' should mingle with the permanent care of not departing from the solid and mysterious ground of the vivid values and tradition of our Romanian art, a ground of infinite complexity', *Ibid.*

The importance of tradition, moderation, common sense and artistic continuity was revealed when art critics and historians dealt with one of the most emblematic formulae that Ceaușescu coined: ‘diversity in unity’.³⁵ As we remember, this syntagma was alluded to within Ceaușescu’s speech at the IXth Congress of the Romanian Communist Party and it was unequivocally employed on the occasion of the 1968 National Conference of the Romanian Artists’ Union. It echoed one of the most emblematic tenets of dialectical materialism (‘the law of unity and the battle of opposites’) which aimed at ‘the totality [...] that does not mean uniformity or homogeneity of any kind but rather a total struggle of all oppositions against each other, a struggle that simultaneously unites these oppositions by making them part of a single world event.’³⁶ As we have seen in the first section of this chapter, in Ceaușescu’s employment of it, the syntagma lost part of its initial meaning as it referred to a controlled diversity of styles within a well-defined ideological framework. When art critics tackled this syntagma, they had in mind the same meaning of the term ‘diversity’, the stylistic diversity. They employed the term in order to laud different techniques which were used by artists and to highlight the stylistic variety that was in sharp contrast with the monolithic academism of the previous period.³⁷ When they addressed the other term of the syntagma, the ‘unity’, they invariably resorted to pompous phrases and ideas to define it. Some critics specifically commented on the ideological aspect of the problem. The syntagma was interpreted as aiming at the establishment of ‘a unitary artistic movement, guided by a clear ideological conception, by open and innovatory spirit’.³⁸ Others drew upon the idea of ‘moral unity’ of Romanian art, as revealed in the passage below. This ‘moral unity’ should have led artists to dismiss as simple fashions the various Western borrowings that ‘had invaded’ Romanian art. Furthermore, the passage that

³⁵ Dan Nemțeanu, ‘Omagiu plasticii românești, eroicei epoci de la 1848’, *Scînteia*, July 6, 1968.

³⁶ Boris Groys, ‘The Art of Totality’, in Evgeny Dobrenko and Eric Naiman (eds.), *The Landscape of Stalinism, The Art and Ideology of Soviet Space* (Seattle and London: University of Washington Press, 2003), 96.

³⁷ Dan Grigorescu, ‘Sub semnul diversității stilistice’, *Arta*, 7, 1965, a chronicle of a graphics exhibition which, under an appropriate title, deals in fact with the variety of techniques employed by the artists who participated in that exhibition.

³⁸ Iulian Mereuță, ‘Mai multe schimburi de idei în sfera artei noastre plastice’, *Scînteia*, September 13, 1968.

follows proves that the treatment of this topic by art historians was not an initiative of their own, but rather a taking over of a subject 'fashionable' in the ideological realm:

Some of our artists start from the idea of stylistic diversity and forget the unity of ideas, the moral unity of our art. Due to this lack of remembering the essential, we can see borrowings 'à la Picasso', 'à la Chagall', 'à la Klee' or their eclectic combination. Being modern or better said contemporary means primarily to be able to assimilate the way of thinking and feeling of the people around you and of being capable of expressing it in your own way. Comrade Nicolae Ceaușescu said at the IXth Congress: The essential thing is that each artist, in his/her own way, preserving his/her own artistic individuality, manifest a high responsibility for the content of his/her work.³⁹

The often invoked 'resistance' to experimental undertakings influenced as well the relationship between works of art, exhibitions and the public's reception. Even when artists were trying to propose more innovative visual solutions, traditionalist art critics were invoking the care and decency that artists should have towards the public who, after two decades of socialist realism, was unable to perceive and understand western artistic trends and styles. Furthermore, art critics made a clear distinction between the public space of an exhibition and the private one of a studio, between a work of art and an experimental endeavour. A work of art that was to be displayed within an exhibition should have a finite character. This meant that the art work should be in a finite form as far as its shape and conception were concerned. Within the regular collective exhibitions as well as in the personal ones, there were not allowed works of art that would give the impression that the artist was still in a tentative, explorative period. An exhibition should be, by all means, the finalisation of an idea in a visual, readable form. As a matter of fact, the Union had no special spaces where young artists or those who had a natural penchant for art experiment could expose their ideas/works. When such manifestations took place, they were

³⁹ Radu Negru, 'Unitatea etică și estetică a stilurilor în plastica noastră', *Scînteia*, 18, June, 1968.

unfavourably received by the public as well as by the official critics.⁴⁰ Even when explorations, searches, experiments – in other words all that could lead to styles incompatible with the official trend – were theoretically accepted as necessary steps in the formation or artistic development of an artist, they were confined to the studios and not allowed to reach public display:

The exacerbation of subjectivity can lead to the situation when the public sees exhibitions of 'explorations', without being able to discern what is looking at ... The artistic explorations (any artist in any epoch had them) are necessary, but for the public they cannot be of any interest before they concretised in a finite work of art under every aspect...⁴¹

The preoccupation for what was exposed within the Union's spaces was justified by the care for the Romanian public, whose artistic receptivity was not supposed to be aggressed, but, on the contrary, modeled: 'If an artist offends excessively the existing receptivity of art lovers, he/she has no right to complain against the 'opacity' of our public. The arpeggios, the scales, no matter what brilliant they are, are practiced at home not during the concert.'⁴² All this manner of treating exhibitions – in the written press and in the way they were assembled as well – was the result of the way exhibitions were conceived: firstly an occasion for educating the public and only after that an artist's manner of displaying his/her work.

This manner of conceiving exhibitions and the role of a work of art in general was part of a larger debate on militant art, which, in its turn, was connected with the discussions about national art. The correlation and often intermingling of the two topics aimed at the 'politicising' of the discourse on national art, at the singling out of the works of art with 'national' topics or references as the kernel of Romanian art production. The debate on militant art during Ceaușescu Era circulated

⁴⁰ The exhibition organised within the Apollo Gallery (which was a space that belonged to the Union) produced vivid discussions in the press. See for this C. R. Constantinescu (*Scinteia Tineretului*, 21 October 1970) and Alexandru Ivăsiuc (*România literară*, 1 October 1970).

⁴¹ Marcel Chirnoagă, 'Artistul și publicul', *Arta Plastică*, 1, 1965, 7.

⁴² N. Argintescu-Amza, 'Artistul și publicul', *Arta Plastică*, 1, 1965, 6.

antinomies and arguments that recalled sometimes the great debates that had taken place in journals in the 1950s, without having their virulence. The nucleus of those debates was the pair militant art – art for art's sake. For example, the art critic Dan Grigorescu started an article where he was supposed to address the issue of tradition in art with a discussion about militant art in a universal context.⁴³ He remarked on the general tendency in the post 1945 period towards an art concerned with 'the participation in the social existence', disparaging at the same time those theoreticians who still supported 'art as a form of pure contemplation, as a construction that can be justified by itself and for itself, cut off from any social and political purposes'.⁴⁴ The next step in the author's argumentation was that of singling out the attempt of each nation to define its identity as one of the essential features of the postwar international politics, especially in the context of an increasingly dynamic world, where the exchange of information and ideas was so intense. Art was equally influenced by this rapid flux of dissemination of ideas and artistic forms. That was why artists and theoreticians should attempt to 'establish a coherent and functional rapport between innovation and tradition, in other words the conservation of the specific character of a national culture.'⁴⁵ In conclusion, Grigorescu pleaded for a militant art that would address the contemporary political and social issues of each country and would be careful to preserve its national character. Innovation was to be attentively controlled whilst politically or socially un-engaged art considered obsolete and dangerous.

Art experimentalism continued in spite of the indications given by the official line and art theoreticians had to find different ways of dealing with it. One of the solutions they came up with was that of accommodating the traditional art creation with the modernist, international trends. This was in fact a more 'productive' way of dealing with the notions of art experimentalism and 'national art' as it obliged art critics and historians to engage in a more sophisticated dialogue with the art of the past or to establish connections with well defined segments and periods of the

⁴³ Dan Grigorescu, 'Înțelesuri ale tradiției', *Arta*, 5, 1986.

⁴⁴ Ibid, 12.

⁴⁵ Ibid.

Romanian art. The first task put forward for the art critics and historians was to explain the abstract production of the time as a normal, organic development of the old artistic styles. In other words, they had to find a manner of linking the abstract tendencies registered in the Romanian art of the late 1960s and the beginning of the 1970s with the traditional artistic heritage. The most ideologically promising solution that they came up with was that of seeing in the abstract repertoire of forms and signs of the Romanian folk art the source of inspiration for these tendencies:

One of the central problems of our artistic creation is to express originally the Romanian artistic environment. The modern leaning toward the system of synthetic thinking and the concision of language can find a vast repertoire of solutions in the universe of forms of our folk art and of our laic art developed from the former.⁴⁶

More determined, the art critic Ion Frunzetti, one of the most prominent figures in the world of arts of that time, reversed the relationship established above between the abstract art and the Romanian folk art by stating emphatically that, in fact, the Romanian people has done abstract art since its inception:

The Romanian people has done abstract art since it exists; take a look at the first lesson of the geometrical ornamentation. Based on this, a contemporary abstract art can be realised, an art that twenty million Romanians would be able to understand!⁴⁷

This manner of dealing with the issue of folk/abstract art did not only want to accommodate the two forms of art and to underline the primacy of the Romanians even in this respect, but it also attempted to solve the problem of acceptance/accessibility of the abstract art. Frunzetti's words could be seen also as

⁴⁶ The RAU's National Committee Report, National Conference of the Romanian Artists' Union, April 18-21, 1968, ASB, *fond* 2239, UAP, File 14/1968, 59.

⁴⁷ Ion Frunzetti, 'Tradiție și cultură', in *În căutarea tradiției* (Bucharest: Meridiane, 1998), 116. The article was initially published in *România literară* on May 6, 1971.

an endeavour to give the right of existence to a form of art hardly acceptable by the officialdom.

Furthermore, art historians tried to demonstrate that the folk vein was an underlying, perennial element that could be identified in every epoch regardless of the external influences exerted upon Romanian art. The folk element was the one that offered a certain pattern and stability to the Romanian art creation; it was, in fact, the kernel of the national specificity, the ancient and unadulterated sap of the Romanian art and of the Romanians' soul:

In the case of our art, the historical reality demonstrates the permanent correlation with the fundamental ingredient of folk creation, that goes back up to the remote origins of our art; that spiritual fond [folk creation] in which N. Iorga identified the living signs of the soul of our people, its authentic features, that remained intact in their essence all along the two millennium existence of our people. Underlining the importance of the idea of permanence and specificity of the Romanian civilisation [...] Al. Busuioceanu observed with acuity already in 1931: 'The folk spirit of the old Romanian art, of the autochthonism of our artistic expression itself is dominated by the same specific characters, in its folk and modern artistic forms as well. The creation of the artist of the past could not be original apart from this spirit. Byzantine, Gothic or Renaissance-like, the expressive line has always been moulded according to the sensibility needs of our people and of its ancient art'.⁴⁸

The massive orientation towards past, the attempt to read even the abstract manifestations through the pattern of re-employing an ancient repertoire of forms eventually brought into discussion the problem of withdrawal in an *illo tempore*, of isolationism and lack of connection with the pulse of the world. It also led to tackling the issue of originality which was linked with that of authenticity. To all these suspicions of isolation and orientation towards past, critics responded giving

⁴⁸ Gheorghe Cosma, 'Arta contemporană', *Arta* 5-6, 1974, 6.

the example of Brâncuși's works, that began to be massively interpreted by the influence of folk art.⁴⁹ Through this almost unilateral process of reading his works, Brâncuși became the most important figure in a relatively long list of 19th and early 20th century artists, whose works were considered representative for the true depiction of the Romanian spirit. Consequently, an artistic pantheon, similar to that built up in the field of history, became available and ceaselessly circulated. This gave birth as well to another related topic, that of the original Romanian contribution to world art heritage, which only could be achieved through recourse to the traditional forms of art:

History is merciless with all empty forms, with all that does not bear the sign of profound authenticity. The way to authenticity, to universality goes naturally [...] through this pattern, through this inner form which is given by the national history and culture.⁵⁰

The process of linking the current artistic creation with the traditional forms of art had in fact several levels. At a first declamatory level, the continuity between tradition and contemporary art seemed to need no demonstration. It was a widely accepted assumption that 'far from being opposed, tradition and contemporary visions of the world mix together and complete each other.'⁵¹ Furthermore, it was affirmed that real progress in art was not possible without a thorough understanding and reliance on past artistic achievement:

The program of our Party, the result of a deep understanding of the laws of socialist development, demonstrates that each step toward tomorrow must be founded on the accumulated human values, on the experience and moral force achieved, on the perennial hopes and expectations of our people for which its best sons gave their lives. Thus, our art proves its power and authenticity also

⁴⁹ Monica Lovinescu speaks about a confiscation of Brâncuși who became 'national value, sanctified almost'. See Monica Lovinescu, 'Reflecții la un centenar. Brâncuși și dogmaticii', March 9, 1976, Open Society Archives, *fond* 300-60-1, Box 101.

⁵⁰ Mircea Popescu, 'În artă, calea spre universalitate trece prin matca spiritualității naționale', *Scînteia*, November 8, 1968.

⁵¹ Dumitru Ghiață, 'A reprezenta simțirea românească, vremurile noi', *Scînteia*, April 17, 1968.

through its capacity of processing and integrating the collective spirituality, developed in specific historical circumstances, namely through its values of continuity, assimilation and rediscovery of the living spirit of tradition.⁵²

A second level of the process consisted in projecting contemporary concepts and ideas upon past artistic achievements in order to prove the continuity between past and present. This undertaking had the best results within the field of history where the events of the past were re-written according to the Party ideology and needs of legitimisation, but it proved to be efficient in the field of art history as well. Here is a passage that highlights this arbitrary intermingling of past and current concepts:

We have today a better understanding of the perennial values of our multi-secular art, in which we recognise ideas of great vitality, such as optimism and confidence in the laws of the world, love for the deeds and faces of people, for nature, as well as the delicate leaning for moderation, beauty of forms, for freshness and expressiveness of colour.⁵³

Whereas the 'the love for nature', 'leaning for moderation' or '[leaning for] freshness and expressiveness of colour' belong to the traditional way in which Romanian spirituality and art creation were defined, the attributes of 'confidence in the laws of the world' or 'love for the deeds and faces of people' are obviously new additions to an extended and mixed definition of Romanianness.

But probably the most important way in which the connection between the art of the past and that of the Ceaușescu Era was established was through bringing into the foreground the discussion about the painting of historical inspiration. This discussion facilitated the recuperation of the mediaeval-Byzantine segment of Romanian art in terms of themes, manner, technique and especially style. It played an important role in providing the necessary tools for the shaping of Ceaușescu's image in a historical, mediaeval leader-like posture and fused the bulky chapter of

⁵² Ion Sălișteanu, 'Tradiție și artă', *Arta* 10, 1975, 1.

⁵³ Dumitru Ghiață, 'A reprezenta simțirea românească, vremurile noi', *Scînteia*, April 17, 1968.

historically inspired works of art against which the Romanian leader's image projected itself.

The art of historical inspiration was, undoubtedly, one of the best defined trends in the art of the 1970s and the 1980s. It supported and translated visually the official nationalist discourse that praised the glorious past of Romania and its famous leaders. By evoking certain historical events and personages, the works of art of historical inspiration represented a visual stimulus for a larger public. This type of painting set up links between contemporary and past moments, thus giving the impression of continuity and national cohesion, and aimed at ascertaining an artistic tradition even in this respect.⁵⁴ Ultimately, it allowed the carving of a space for Ceaușescu's imagery in a manner that made it look like a genuine development of an old artistic tradition rather than the taking over of a foreign pattern. The style of most of the works representing Ceaușescu recalled the post-Byzantine style of the votive portrait in the mediaeval church or the icon painting. The flat style of these representations was influenced by the rich production of historically inspired painting that started to emerge from the middle of the sixties on and which more often than not depicted historical events or figures trying to respect the historical accuracy: buildings, interiors, gowns, physical appearance, etc. Therefore the painters sought inspiration in the visual representations produced in the epoch they depicted, which were usually the votive portraits and the mediaeval manuscripts. As one of the main goals of Romanian propaganda was that of building Ceaușescu's image as a national hero, continuer of a long line of illustrious Romanian leaders, his representation aimed at resembling visually and stylistically the local traditional patterns.

The first step towards the carving of a space for Ceaușescu's image was the historicisation of the Ceaușescu Era. We have seen in chapter 1 the various devices

⁵⁴ '...the modern Romanian painting school ... in whose thematic register we can notice a predominance of the historical topics with a militant, political relevance. Romanian painting was, therefore, since its beginning, a committed one...' Virgil Căndea, 'Istoria patriei și pictura', *Arta* 1, 1977, 3.

employed in order to transform the contemporary period and its achievements into an equal of the great epochs of the past. In the field of art, the art critics and historians tried to give to the depiction of the contemporary reality the same importance as they gave to the theme of historical painting.⁵⁵ They strove to demonstrate that the painting of historical inspiration should not be seen as an obsolete enterprise but as one that would contribute to a better understanding of the present. This idea is clearly stated in an article entitled *Thoughts on the National Epic*, signed by the art critic Dan Grigorescu:

I want to say that in the artistic conscience of the painters and writers, of musicians and sculptors, the historical theme has the same aesthetic weight as the creation inspired by actuality; that the national history cannot be understood otherwise than as a perfect unity, in which moments succeed themselves, mutually highlighting and explaining each other; and that the general perspective is the one determined by the contemporary vision.⁵⁶

The last observation in this quotation is very interesting because it underlines a mechanism that was widely employed in order to use the past for the benefit of the present. The same art critic Dan Grigorescu develops this topic in an article dealing with the 50th anniversary exhibition of the 1907 peasant revolt. He stresses the importance of the history inspired art and praises the 'citizen-artist' who devotes himself/herself to these kind of themes:

For the creators of our time, looking at the decisive moments in the history of our people and interpreting them in a contemporary spirit and with contemporary means of expression, signify *continuing a noble tradition of civic attitude*, signify *responding to the fundamental demands of our epoch*. The position of the citizen-artist, who participates to the life, to the struggles of his or her epoch, who fights for the promotion of the noble ideals, *this*

⁵⁵ After 1965, the articles and studies that approached the theme of historical painting became very frequent. See for instance, Dan Grigorescu, '1848, Artiștii și revoluția', *Arta* 6, 1968 sau Ion Frunzetti, 'Pictorii și Unirea țărilor române', *Arta* 1, 1966

⁵⁶ Dan Grigorescu, 'Gânduri despre epopeea națională', *Arta* 2-3, 1976, 5.

permanence of Romanian culture, will find doubtlessly a new and convincing expression.⁵⁷

A second step in the process of promoting Ceaușescu's image in the context of the newly emerging historical painting was that of putting the accent on the depiction of past historical figures. The century of nationalism offered a large gallery of revolutionaries and leaders who could have been ideologically exploited by the artists of the communist period. The period was rich in fundamental historical events (the 1848 Revolution, the 1859 Union of the Romanian Principalities, the 1877 War of Independence) which illustrated precisely the ideas on which the Ceaușescu regime based its profound nationalist agenda: fight for sovereignty, unity and liberty. On the other hand, this period, especially the first half of the century, was a very interesting period due to artistic reasons as well. It represented a period of change from mural to easel painting under the influence of Western canons, the very beginning of a phase that culminated in the second half of the century with the coalescence of the modern Romanian art school. Therefore the interest of art historians in the art of the XIXth century was a legitimate one.⁵⁸ The problem was that the largest part of the studies dealing with this period focused on the art devoted to the historical moments aforementioned and tried to establish connections with the contemporary reality. For instance, the historian Dan Berindei published in *Arta* in 1967 a text in which he analysed how the painters of the first half of the XIXth century prepared through their work the moment of the 1859 Union of Walachia and Moldavia. He underlined the anticipatory, didactic spirit of that painting within which a special space was given to the depiction of past personalities who had embodied the idea of fight for the unity of the Romanian people:

Through allegories, through historical scenes devoted to a glorious past and which in general suggested the *necessity* of the Union, as well as through the portraits of past personalities, the plastic artists vigorously manifested their

⁵⁷ Dan Grigorescu, '1907', *Arta* 3, 1967.

⁵⁸ See for a professional analysis of this artistic period Andrei Cornea, '*Primitivii*' picturii românești moderne (Bucharest: Meridiane, 1980).

patriotism, their attachment to the cause of the Union. Within the historical scenes that they reconstructed, a special attention was given to Mihai Viteazul.⁵⁹

Berindei's reference to historical painting that 'suggested the *necessity* of the Union' echoes in fact the well-known principal of Socialist Realism of depicting the reality as it ought to be or as it will be. The employment of this principle in the analysis of the Romanian historical painting and especially in that of the representation of historical personalities is very interesting for our investigation because it was one of the ways in which the construction of Ceaușescu's visual image was influenced. The discourse on national art and historical painting played, through analogies and allusions, the role of a 'handbook', of a corrector for what Ceaușescu's image was supposed to represent and transmit. It is not pure coincidence that these types of articles and studies started to appear at the end of the sixties and the beginning of the seventies when Ceaușescu's image as a strong national leader began to gain contour. Using clear-cut, didactic titles (as, for instance, the title of Berindei's article - *The Historical Moment and the Artistic Creation*) and a style that left little space for misunderstanding, these articles dealt with the relationship that *existed* and *should exist* between artists and their epoch, with the patriotic duty that artists have towards their people.⁶⁰ Moreover, these studies paid minute attention to the analysis of the large production of portraits of the period. As most of the portraits were devoted to the revolutionaries of 1848 (Nicolae Bălcescu, Avram Iancu, etc) and the leaders of the 1859 Union (Alexandru Ioan Cuza, Mihail Kogălniceanu), the art historians focused on their investigation, on their significance for the period when they had been created and on the importance of portraying historical figures in general.⁶¹ Although not clearly stated, the link between the depiction of these past personalities and that of Ceaușescu was

⁵⁹ Dan Berindei, 'Momentul istoric și creația artistică', *Arta* 1, 1967, 2. Mihai Viteazul was the *voievod* of Walachia who managed to unite for a very brief period the three Romanian countries in 1600.

⁶⁰ Virgil Cândea, '1918 – 1968 – Un act istoric fundamental', *Arta* 11, 1968, 2.

⁶¹ See for instance, Ion Frunzetti, *Pictori revoluționari de la 1848* (Bucharest: Meridiane, 1988).

implied through collateral references to patriotism, the responsibility of the artist-citizen or the need to honour the great personalities of the Romanian people.

The interest for the historical painting of the XIXth century had as a result the production of works of art that focused on the depiction of the main historical moments and personalities of the century of nationalism. A special emphasis was put on the representation of the 1848 revolutionaries and the leaders of the 1859 Union of Walachia and Moldavia.⁶² What was nevertheless interesting was the style in which most of these paintings were realised. Although they depicted historical figures following their XIXth century canonical representations, they did not also copy the style of those portraits. They were realised in a flat style that rather resembled the mediaeval mural painting. This was the case of the painting entitled *Revoluționari la 1848* by Virgil Almășanu⁶³ (PLATE 9). Almășanu, a painter of historical themes *par excellence*, produced works of historical inspiration both in mural and oil painting. He had a very particular style that preserved the hieratic forms and the reduced chromatic palette of the mediaeval painting. He often acknowledged the importance the mediaeval mural painting had in the crystallisation of his artistic style and praised the artistry of the mediaeval painters.⁶⁴ The work under scrutiny here is a perfect illustration of the way he managed to adapt XIXth century models to a style that reminded of the mediaeval mural painting. Almășanu depicts the main leaders of the 1848 Revolution in a rigid, hieratic way although he maintains the individuality of the figures. The recognizable leaders (Alecsandri, Kogălniceanu, Bălcescu) within the painting are facially rendered according to the portraits that had been realised by their contemporaries whereas their postures, their silhouettes, resemble the mediaeval representations. For instance, the features of Nicolae Bălcescu, the emblematic leader of the Revolution, who is depicted in the foreground looking directly towards the viewer,

⁶² The series of the XIXth century historical figures on which Romanian propaganda, and consequently art historians, focused ended up with Alexandru Ioan Cuza (the elected leader of the two Romanian Principalities). No attention was given to Carol I of Hohenzollern, who became the Prince of the Romanian Principalities in 1860 (and then their King in 1881) and who played a crucial role in the 1877 War of Independence and in the modernisation of Romania in general.

⁶³ Virgil Almășanu, *Revoluționari la 1848* (Revolutionaries at 1848), 1978.

⁶⁴ Theodor Enescu, *Virgil Almășanu* (București: Meridiane, 1979), 27.

are copied from a contemporary portrait of Bălcescu realised by Gheorghe Tattarescu (1820-1894)⁶⁵ (PLATE 10). Tattarescu, a Rome educated painter, considered the main representative of the Italian academism in Romania, produced mainly mythological and religious works inspired by the classical literary sources. But he was also a painter of historical subjects. He focused especially on the portrayal of his contemporaries who were involved in the historical moments of the XIXth century. In these portraits, although he maintained his academic style, the proximity with his models, his intimate knowledge of their personalities and features can be felt. Therefore, there is certain warmth and affection in these portraits. Bălcescu's portrait is a perfect illustration of Tattarescu's portraiture. It is not the portrait of Bălcescu-the revolutionary but that of Bălcescu-the man, with his physical weakness exhibited (he suffered for a long time and finally died of tuberculosis) but also with his kindness and intelligence transposed into the painting. Almășanu's depiction of Bălcescu is far more austere even though it respects the physical resemblance. The features of the face are rougher; he gazes into the viewer's eyes with a look that was labeled 'saintly fanaticism'.⁶⁶ His body is tense and although it is represented in a schematised manner, it transmits the determination and strength that Bălcescu-the revolutionary had. Almășanu managed to transform a delicate, human XIXth century portrait into a powerful, eye-catching representation of Bălcescu. He succeeded in doing so by relying on the compositional rules of the Byzantine mural painting: the flatness of figures, their alignment and overlapping, scarcity of colours and tones, big surfaces covered by uniform colours, harsh gestures and penetrating gazes.

Whereas the XIXth century had a lot to offer in terms of national heroes who could be used as models and background for Ceaușescu's visual image, the mediaeval painting, especially the votive portrait, provided a clear visual scheme for the representation of the Romanian leader. Art historians started to pay minute attention to the votive portraits which had been the only 'laic' portraits in the church painting

⁶⁵ Gheorghe Tattarescu, *Nicolae Bălcescu*, 1851.

⁶⁶ Vasile Florea, *Artă românească modernă și contemporană* (Bucharest: Meridiane, 1982), 321.

produced in the Romanian Principalities almost up to the XIXth century. As the vast majority of the churches constructed up to the XVIIIth century were foundations of the leaders of the Romanian Principalities, the votive portraits represented the founders along with their families in a dedicatory attitude. Whilst their main function was that of representing the *voievozi* as devoted Christians who dedicated their foundations to God, the votive portraits were also used by the leaders themselves as a means of displaying their social status, their signs of power. When these votive portraits started to come under the scrutiny of the art historians of the Ceaușescu Era, they were given a more extensive significance. Because all these *voievozi* were represented in the votive portraits in their official outfits (crowns, weapons included), the portraits were also seen as indicators of the fight for independence and national dignity. This broader interpretation accentuated the Romanian *voievod's* image as a defender and guarantor of the country's independence and paved the way to a similar depiction of Ceaușescu. More importantly, it conferred to the portrait of the leader certain attributes that became indispensable references whenever such a portrait was analysed:

The votive portrait does not limit itself to the representation of the *voievozi*, with the signs of their status, but, especially in the case of our troublesome history, it has a special significance in the evocation of our traditions of fight and national dignity, for the defense of the right to existence and the independence of our motherland.⁶⁷

Apart from this significance, the votive portrait also induced a feeling of atemporality, of frozen time, a feeling that Ceaușescu strove so much to achieve through the way he constructed his public persona and that in which his rule was portrayed by propaganda. Moreover, the mediaeval mural painting and the votive portrait were also an important source of inspiration in terms of style and technique. Apart from the revival produced in the Romanian art through the approaching of

⁶⁷ Gheorghe Cosma, *Pictura istorică românească* (Bucharest: Meridiane, 1986), 14.

national history topics that had been ignored before 1965⁶⁸, this kind of painting also contributed to a stylistic refreshment that would lead, along with other influences, to the coalescence of the official portraiture style. This style, that the art critic Magda Cârneci saw as a figurative style tinted with Byzantine elements⁶⁹, became a well defined trend that pleased both the leadership and the artistic community as it meant both a return to a local visual pattern and a connection (at least at the beginning) with fashionable art currents in the West. The simplifications and stylizations that the artists made under the influence of the Byzantine mural painting led to a schematisation of the composition, to a simplified, calligraphic style in which the accent was put on suggesting the narration of the painting rather than giving substance to the personages depicted and in which little attention was given to the rigours of classical painting such as perspective or composition. This approach was considered very modern. The art critic Theodor Enescu comments as follows on the influence of mural painting:

The mural painting forces the artist to operate simplification of expression that meets with the most modern initiatives in painting [...] primitive tendencies, *à-plat*, drawing that accentuates the counters, simplified shadows, luminosity of tones.⁷⁰

For all the reasons described above, mediaeval mural painting and especially the votive portrait were considered a more appropriate model to follow for the articulation of the Romanian leader's visual image.

A brief comparison between a 16th century votive portrait and a portrait of Ceaușescu reveals to what extent artists employed the mediaeval pattern of portraying the *voievozi* in the articulation of Ceaușescu's portraits. Although the two

⁶⁸ '...the renewal of Romanian art occurred especially in the last two decades, since our spiritual tradition, our national history, from its most ancient manifestations until the present days, has become the main subject of our works of art...', Dan Grigorescu, 'Înțelesuri ale tradiției', *Arta* 5, 1986, 13.

⁶⁹ Magda Cârneci, *Artele plastice în România* (Bucharest: Meridiane, 2000), 86.

⁷⁰ Theodor Enescu, *Virgil Almășanu* (București: Meridiane, 1979), 16.

portraits were produced in different centuries and in different media, they share very much in terms of composition, use of color, expression of the personages depicted. The 16th century votive portrait represents Mircea the Old and it covers one of the walls of the ancient monastery in *Curtea de Argeș*⁷¹ (PLATE 11). The portrait of Ceaușescu is entitled *Omagiu* and it was realised by Vasile Pop Negreșteanu in 1987⁷² (PLATE 12). What is striking in the two portraits is the similar posture of the two leaders represented. Both of them are frontally depicted displaying the symbols of their power: Mircea the Old wears his crown and his red cloak whilst Ceaușescu wears the tri-colored sash and holds the sceptre in his right hand. They are represented in a flat style that accentuates the contours rather than the volumes of the figures. Both silhouettes give the impression of imponderability, of floating in the air, for they do not stand on a solid base. Moreover, the gestures of the two leaders are almost identical. They are gestures of indicating something, of directing the viewer's attention towards a certain object depicted nearby. Whilst we know that Mircea the Old points to his foundation, the old church of *Curtea de Argeș* (represented as a miniature church next to him), Ceaușescu indicates a construction site, minimally represented through the depiction of three workers, a crane and a bulldozer. But apart from this, in the background of the painting, there are scattered other small 'images' that render the achievements of the Ceaușescu Era. In a word, both leaders are represented as founders; Mircea the Old as the founder of the old church of *Curtea de Argeș*, Ceaușescu as the founder of modern, communist Romania. There are also other elements that accentuate the feeling of a-temporality that was initially implied by the idea of founding. Ceaușescu is represented under a sort of niche that resembles the niches under which saints were depicted in the Byzantine mural painting⁷³ (PLATE 13). Above his head, Negreșteanu painted a combination of strange symbols that can be read taking into consideration their significance in the mediaeval painting. The emblems customarily depicted on the national and the communist flags are represented here on something that resembles an opened book. On the top of the two emblems, a pigeon is depicted with its wings

⁷¹ *Mircea the Old*, Monastery of *Curtea de Argeș*, 1526.

⁷² Vasile Pop Negreșteanu, *Omagiu* (Homage), 1987.

⁷³ *Saints Andronikos and Platon*, Monastery of Golia, Iași, 1659-1661.

largely opened. A sort of rainbow (composed of the three colours of the national flag) forms an arch that unites the two emblems and the pigeon, and protects Ceaușescu who stands beneath. The juxtaposition of the three elements (the pigeon, the book and the rainbow), that have an obvious religious significance, and their positioning within the painting are not at all arbitrary. They aim at conferring on Ceaușescu the aura of a chosen one, at freezing the time and validating what is represented within the image (Ceaușescu as an exemplary leader and the amazing achievements of his rule). The most striking element is the pigeon. It is not rendered as the dove-symbol of peace was usually depicted in other representations of Ceaușescu - seen from its profile and with an olive branch in its beak. The manner in which it is represented in this painting (its wings widely opened in a protective posture) recalls the way in which an angel or the hand of God were represented above the heads of the *voievozi* in the votive portraits⁷⁴ (Figure 6). The depiction of the pigeon in Negreșteanu's work preserves the same feeling of protection and atemporality. As we shall see further in chapter 5, Negreșteanu was one of the painters who frequently employed in his works devoted to the Ceaușescus elements from the Byzantine, religious repertoire and he managed to keep, most of the time, their initial meaning.

The initially veiled references to historical personalities and epochs or the tendentious interpretations of the art of the past were rapidly abandoned and art historians started to make more obvious analogies between different historical figures and Ceaușescu. Especially in the eighties, the link between past personalities and the lauding of Ceaușescu, as well as the call to represent the latter in a historical perspective were openly stated. For instance, an article from 1986, that was supposed to deal with the various manifestations (art exhibitions included) devoted to the anniversary of 600 years since the ascendance to the throne of the Romanian Country of Mircea the Great, ended up with a blatant praising of Ceaușescu. We shall cite below a longer passage in order to offer the reader the possibility to follow

⁷⁴ *Voievod Bălea*, Church of Crișcior, end of the 14th century

exactly the alternation between the treatment of that particular event and the praising of Ceaușescu:

The anniversary of 600 years since the ascendance to the throne of the Romanian Country of the Great Mircea Voievod, prominent personality of national history, was, for the entire country, the celebration of a moment which – as Comrade Nicolae Ceaușescu underscored – “*marked the beginning of the rebirth of our people and of the formation of our nation*”. “*We honour* – said the leader of our Party and State at the tumultuous mass meeting at Tîrgoviște – *all our predecessors, Mircea the Great, Stefan the Great, Mihai Viteazul and many more. We honour our people, the true maker of our history! We honour the revolutionaries, we honour the democrats, the communists, all those who, in different phases of development of our motherland, have done their duty in front of our people, in front of our motherland, those who have never said that it was difficult! They have always said: We must do everything to preserve a free present and future for our people, to offer to our nation a dignified place among the nations of the world!*” The manifestations occasioned by this anniversary were a homage brought both to the heroic times of the past and to the unprecedented achievements of the present time, of the ‘*Nicolae Ceaușescu Epoch*’, to the great man – The Hero of Romania and The Hero of Peace – who, embodying the most noble qualities of the Romanian people, creates a historic destiny for our country. Magnificent continuer of the work done by the most important predecessors, founder of a new country and of a new life, the son of our nation devoted his entire life and revolutionary activity to serving the supreme interests of our motherland, fighting without fatigue for the cause of liberty and national independence, for the well-being and happiness of our people, for the affirmation of the Romanian vocation for peace and understanding between the peoples of the world⁷⁵

The passage above highlights the way both Ceaușescu and the art critics employed a celebration of a historical personality in order to establish links between the past and

⁷⁵ ‘Continuarea unei vocații’, *Artă* 10, 1986, 2.

the present. Ceaușescu speaks about the need to honour all the predecessors who contributed to the preservation of the independence and prosperity of Romania, from the old times to the contemporary period. He sees the history as a continuum although he puts special emphasis on the role communists played in the fight for liberty and self-determination. In their turn, art critics faithfully put into practice Ceaușescu's words when they describe the manifestations devoted to the anniversary of Mircea the Great as a homage to the Ceaușescu Epoch as well. Their zeal in describing Ceaușescu's merits surpasses the attention that they pay to the depiction of Mircea the Great, proving that towards the end of the regime, the anniversaries of different historical personalities and events were only used as a background for the celebration of the real hero of Romania, namely Ceaușescu.

To conclude, the process of defining national art was strongly linked with the more general enterprise of re-defining such terms as 'nation', 'national past', 'national history'. As a consequence, the large framework within which this process took place was that delimited by ideological and political creeds, but it also encompassed references to traditional ways of conceiving the notion of 'national art'. Whilst Ceaușescu focused on simple definitions of national art that basically encompassed the themes that he considered essential for a national art creation (national past, the achievements of the contemporary epoch and the natural beauties of the country), the art critics and historians came up with more elaborate definitions. As the notion of 'national art' was defined in contrast with the experimental tendencies that appeared from the middle of the sixties on, art critics and historians had first to reprove these tendencies. The definitions that they elaborated had therefore a demarcating character for they dismissed such notions as 'art for art's sake', 'experimentalism', avant-garde' and pleaded instead for 'militant art', 'moderation', 'tradition of common sense' or 'local tradition'. Furthermore, the definitions that art critics and historians advanced tried to recuperate different layers of Romanian culture. The folkloric-archaic layer – considered both the most neutral from an ideological point of view and the most easily to recuperate in terms of the modernist discourse – was the most widely invoked traditional constituent of the 'national art'.

It also served well the official trend of protochronism. The mediaeval-orthodox layer was employed practically by artists in order to address the issue of painting of historical inspiration. Finally, the modern layer offered a concrete and suitable style for the official production of those years (especially the art of the portrait) and was largely commented on in the 1970s and 1980s. The accent put on the painting of historical inspiration within the discussions on national art was probably the most important aspect for our present discussion as it offered the necessary background against which Ceaușescu's image as a national hero emerged. As we shall see in the chapter devoted to Ceaușescu's iconography, the discussions around the theme of painting of historical inspiration influenced the construction of Ceaușescu's image both in terms of topic and style.

5. Hypostases and Places – The Leader's Iconography

China is not a paradise; Paradise does not exist.
Even the Chinese know it, they must know it, they live
there. Like cavemen, they paint not what they see but
what they want.

Margaret Atwood, *Life before Man*

We do not need idols. We do not need to turn people into
standard-bearers. Marxism-Leninism has rejected and
continues to reject any such concepts that are alien to the
ideology of the working class.

Nicolae Ceaușescu, *Scînteia*, April 27, 1968

'What are we going to do with you? What are you going to
do? What will you become?' [...]

'Nene, I want to be Stalin of Romania!'¹

This chapter deals with the investigation of Ceaușescu's iconography. It attempts to make sense of his painted representations, of the way themes developed and altered within Ceaușescu's iconography. Furthermore, it endeavours to trace the relationship between ideological topics and political events and the emergence and alteration of certain iconographical themes. In the previous chapters we have tried to identify the place of visual images within the cult of Ceaușescu and to single out those alterations in cultural policy and politics which might have influenced the construction of Ceaușescu's visual image. Moreover, we have analysed the articulation of the discourse on national art and the way in which this was gradually

¹ Niculina Ruscescu, the sister of Nicolae Ceaușescu, recounted this dialogue between Ceaușescu and her husband, in whose shoe-repairing shop the former worked as an apprentice. Ceaușescu was supposed to perform small tasks such as receiving the shoes that needed to be cobbled from clients and returning them after they had been fixed. Reportedly he was not of big help as he left in the morning and returned at dusk. This regular conduct provoked the desperate question of his uncle. The authenticity of this episode cannot be proved. Nevertheless, the fact that it emerged after 1989 from several separate sources (former highly ranking politicians included) accounts at least for the currency the story had gained within informal circles during the Ceaușescu regime if not for a grain of truth embedded in it. See for this episode Lavinia Betea, *Alexandru Bârlădeanu despre Dej, Ceaușescu și Iliescu* (Bucharest: Ed. Evenimentul Românesc, 1997), 205.

captured and employed in the construction of Ceaușescu's image as the ultimate 'national hero'. We have identified as well the role that the historical painting played in the configuration of a backdrop against which Ceaușescu's image emerged and developed and its role in providing technical and stylistic tools for the concrete production of the leader's paintings. Internal mechanisms and schemes of promotion within the Romanian Artists' Union, coupled with the cultural policy endorsed by the State and the accent put on national art equally favoured the production of a particular type of art that became a perfect background for the emergence of Ceaușescu's visual image. As we have tried to demonstrate in the previous chapters, all these factors contributed to the shaping of Ceaușescu's image in a form which incorporated an important part of the changes that occurred in the political and cultural arenas. It is the purpose of this chapter to identify the main themes within the iconography of Ceaușescu and to determine the links between the political and cultural shifts and the construction of Ceaușescu's visual image.

We have said from the outset that Ceaușescu's interest in art creation in general and in the promotion of his image through painting in particular was indeed minimal. He was more eager to encourage other forms of the personality cult construction, especially those that involved large crowds of people and those able to preserve his name over time. The mass demonstrations and the architectural transformation of the country seem to have been the preferred means through which Ceaușescu was eager to promote his image. Nevertheless, a considerable production of paintings devoted to him (and to his wife progressively) came out from the circles of professional artists. This production was, however, overshadowed by the works produced by amateur artists that emerged from the middle of the seventies on. The works devoted to Ceaușescu by amateur artists did not necessarily supersede professionals' production in terms of mere quantity, but they became the most visible products due to the space and promotion conferred on them by the State. The various cultural manifestations organised within the national festival 'Song to Romania' offered the ideal space for the backing of the amateurs' movement and, at the same time, for the decrease in importance of the professional artists.

Furthermore, the amateurs' movement came up with numerous kitschy artefacts in unusual media (tile, glass, wheat, beans, etc) that contributed to a loss of visibility of the professionals' creation. Due to this diverse creation, the art production devoted to the Ceaușescu was, without any doubt, one of the most prolific in Eastern Europe (apart from the case of Stalin, of course).

Ceaușescu's visual image evolved over his two and a half decades of rule from that of a popular leader, represented among his countrymen and interacting with them to that of a remote leader, depicted either alone (or with his wife, who became an almost permanent companion, transforming the 'leader's portrait' into a 'presidential couple portrait' from the late seventies onwards) or singled out against a backdrop of human bodies. This gradual process of isolation, of remoteness was accompanied by a process of augmentation of Ceaușescu's image in painting which went along with the increase in size of the paintings. Most probably, this was a trend which followed the general shift in the cult of Ceaușescu that gradually developed towards the construction of Ceaușescu's image as the perfect embodiment of the Leader; the paintings' bigger sizes corresponded to the increasingly sophisticated and sycophantic epithets employed by court poets and writers. It was also a reflection of Ceaușescu's own preference for monumentality to which artists attempted to adapt and follow.² It is nevertheless interesting to note that the aforementioned process of *augmentation* of Ceaușescu's figure within his representations was not at all accompanied by a *monumentalisation* of his figure. In most cases, what could be observed was, on the contrary, a process of loss of substance and volume of his image. This was in stark contrast with the Soviet socialist realism and the way Stalin was represented, especially in the period of full development of his cult. Whilst Stalin's image evolved towards an obvious

² Ceaușescu's predilection for monumental forms in architecture was discussed in the first chapter when the construction of the New Civic Centre was explored. His penchant for 'big sizes' was a general aesthetic orientation. For instance, at the 1978 National Conference of the Romanian Artists' Union, Ceaușescu stated: 'Following this tradition [the ancient tradition of Romanian art], raising it on a superior level in-tune with today's conditions, you should realise works of big dimensions both in terms of the themes approached and in terms of proportions', Nicolae Ceaușescu, 'Cuvîntarea Tovarășului Nicolae Ceaușescu la Conferința Națională a Uniunii Artiștilor Plastici', *Artă* 4/1978.

monumentalisation³ which was evident both in terms of the size and the consistency of Stalin's figure, Ceaușescu's image altered only as far as its size was concerned; it never reached the weight and monumentality of Stalin's representations. It always appeared as a silhouette projected against a background, as a floating, suspended body that usually related itself imperfectly to the other figures in the image.

The reason for this specific manner of depicting Ceaușescu should be sought in the Romanian painting tradition and especially in the way in which it was revisited during the Ceaușescu regime. As we have seen in chapter 2 and 4 the return to national art and, in particular, to folk and Byzantine mural art led to the production of an art that resembled more traditional visual patterns than the Soviet socialist realist model. Although most of the artists who produced paintings representing Ceaușescu were born in the 1930s or 1940s and were exposed to the socialist realist model, either through their training in the Romanian Academies of Fine Arts in the 1950s and 1960s or through trips or grants to the Soviet Union, the return to the local tradition was so powerful and welcome in the mid-1960s that the artists fully embraced this trend. Therefore, the flatness and the lack of perspective, the schematised human silhouettes, the clear drawing that emphasised the contours, the big surfaces of compact colours, all these elements that can be easily detected in most of Ceaușescu's representations, were taken over from folk art and Byzantine mural painting. We shall return to this aspect in the following pages when concrete examples will be analysed. At this point, we would only like to underline this important difference between Stalin's and Ceaușescu's images and the influential role that traditional art played in the remodelling of Romanian art and of Ceaușescu's visual image at the end of the sixties and the beginning of the seventies.

Maintaining the comparative angle, it is probably worth noting that Ceaușescu's visual image was never reduced to very small dimensions as happened, for instance, in the case of North Korea where the image of Kim Il Sung, in the form of an

³ Matthew Cullern Bown, *Art under Stalin* (Oxford: Phaidon, 1991), 181.

insignia, became part of the mandatory 'uniform' of each citizen. The Korean case reveals a different type of relationship between the leader and the led. The physical closeness, almost intimacy, between the led and the image of the leader demonstrates a different conception about the leader. The insignia of Kim Il Sung was a constant reminder of the leader's omnipresence and authority. It was there both in order to confirm the bearers' commitment to the party's politics and their respect towards the leader and to regulate their conduct, for the insignia functioned also as a kind of surveillance device.

A similar dissemination of the leader's image occurred after the death of Lenin in the Soviet Union. In this case, the leader's figure was disseminated through small-sized photographs that resembled the dissemination of icons in the Tsarist epoch. Walter Benjamin analysed this particular phenomenon in his *The Work of Art in the Age of Mechanical Reproduction* and suggested that mechanical reproduction diminished the monumentality, reduced the leader to a human dimension and stripped him off of his overwhelming power.⁴ Nevertheless, through invasive dissemination of these images produced for the masses, Lenin ended up achieving a sort of 'alternate monumentality'.⁵ Leah Dickermann, commenting on Benjamin's observations, noted that the 'quantitative excess' of Lenin's photographs indicated 'the omnipresence of power, its infiniteness and its spectacularization'.⁶

This points to the slightly different roles that the mass-produced images were supposed to play. Whilst Lenin's photographs were meant to fill an empty space left by the deceased leader and to preserve his memory through over-exposure of his image, the insignias of Kim Il Sung functioned as coercing devices, as behaviour regulators that 'supervised' the implementation of the party's policy. Nothing similar occurred in Romania. Ceaușescu's image was never the object of a process

⁴ Walter Benjamin, 'The Work of Art in the Age of Mechanical Reproduction', in Hannah Arendt, (ed.) *Illuminations: Essays and Reflections* (New York: Schocken, 1969), 217-251.

⁵ Leah Dickermann, 'Lenin in the Age of Mechanical Reproduction', in Michael S. Roth and Charles G. Sales (eds.) *Disturbing Remains: Memory, History, and Crisis in the Twentieth Century* (Los Angeles: The Getty Research Institute, 2001), 80.

⁶ *Ibid.*, 81.

of size reduction. On the contrary, his images suffered a process of augmentation that touched all his representations, from the photographs that adorned every single room in public buildings to his paintings or even the reproductions that were circulated in the journals of that time.⁷ In this sense, the evolution of Ceaușescu's visual image resembles more that of Stalin's, with the aforementioned difference on which we shall dwell later in this chapter. This particularity of Ceaușescu's visual representation accounts for the construction of the leader's image in a heroic dimension, as a remote authority, as a leader with super-human qualities. In spite of themes and motifs that tried to counter-balance this tendency and to stress the human side of Ceaușescu (protector of children, close to the working people, etc), his image ended up in the eighties as that of a cold, remote leader, preoccupied with his future image in a historical perspective.

The emergence and especially the form of Ceaușescu's painted representations was the result of various factors. As we have seen in the previous chapters, his image was influenced by the accentuated nationalism promoted by the regime from the very beginning. Nationalism oriented the political and, implicitly, the historical and artistic discourses towards the past and modelled Ceaușescu's public image in a strong relationship to past historical figures and events.⁸ Although the emphasis put on the past came somehow in contradiction with the communist rhetoric focused on the future, the mixture between the two directions resulted in a conflicting yet complex image of Ceaușescu. The image incorporated concrete stylistic elements that were taken over from the mediaeval painting, more precisely from the votive portrait, and it tended to be configured in an a-temporal, apparatus-like portrait that

⁷ N. C. Munteanu noticed the awkward way in which photographs of mass demonstrations published in journals were doctored in order to impose a oversized image of Ceaușescu: huge placards with his portraits were added in the aerial photographs representing the crowd marching or packed in a square; not only that these placards were immense and people would not have been able to carry them, but they were inserted in a totally defective way, 'laying' basically on people (and not inserted under a certain angle as it would have been normal) in order to offer a maximum visibility to the image. See for this N. C. Munteanu, 'Fotografiile trucate ale epocii Ceaușescu', May 13, 1985, Open Society Archives, *fond* 300-60-1, box 705.

⁸ 'Nationalism cannot orient people toward the future because the future is a place where it has very little to offer. Rather, it is always focused on the past, on a grand history of heroic and noble ancestors. In the past, you can pick and choose and lie at will.' Jan Urban, 'Nationalism as a Totalitarian Ideology', *Social Research*, Vol. 58, No. 4, Winter 1991, 778.

would emphasise Ceaușescu's image as a national hero, continuer of a long line of illustrious *voievozi*. On the other hand, the communist rhetoric promoted the image of an active leader who designed and directed the big plans that would transform Romania into a communist country. Ceaușescu was therefore also depicted as a down-to-earth, dynamic leader who planned and supervised the construction of a new Romania. As we shall see further, this complementary image of Ceaușescu was, awkwardly enough, not rendered in a style different from that in which the hieratic, apparatus-like image of Ceaușescu was constructed.

On a more practical level, the emergence and the form of the Romanian leader's image was shaped through various mechanisms within the Romanian Artists' Union (the acquisition policy, the promotion criteria, etc). As we have seen in chapter 3, because the State was the main buyer of works of art in Romania and the criteria of acquisition were imposed by the buyer (works of art that would meet the ideological and artistic criteria enunciated by the State), the artists gradually had to follow those criteria if they wanted to sell any of their works. The emergence of Ceaușescu's image was a natural continuation of the thematic, historical and anniversary exhibitions and topics that had been contracted by the State. His image as a national hero and as an energetic communist leader emerged and developed against this backdrop of State sponsored exhibitions. Gradually artists started to respond to the more or less veiled signals and demands of the Party leadership of depicting the contemporary reality, the true heroes of the present times.

We have seen in chapter 3 the mechanisms through which artists were pushed towards producing works of art devoted to the achievements of the Ceaușescu Epoch and, later on, to Ceaușescu himself. We have also seen the rhetoric of the Union's leadership when they wanted to mobilise artists for a certain exhibition. The first clear reference that we were able to identify regarding the need to represent through artistic means 'the leaders of the Party and of the State' was made in May

1971, within an internal meeting of the Romanian Artists' Union.⁹ In the first part of the meeting - a plenary meeting of the National Committee of the Romanian Artists' Union - the artists discussed various aspects concerning the activity of the Union such as the timetable and the program of exhibitions, funds available for artists, acquisition policy, etc. The second part of the meeting started with the presentation of a 'document'¹⁰ by the sculptor Oscar Han. The presented document was a strange insertion in the general course of the meeting as it had no connection with the previous discussions and it was not followed by any debate. It had the form and it used the rhetoric of a personal confession, but the timing makes us think that the document presented by Han was more than the enthusiastic reaction of an isolated artist. Oscar Han (1891-1976) was a sculptor of the old generation, already established in the interwar period and who created over time a gallery of historical figures (Nicolae Bălcescu, Mircea the Old, Mihai Viteazul, Constantin Brâncoveanu) and cultural personalities (Mihai Eminescu, Nicolae Iorga, Vasile Pârvan). His style was often very simplified, characterised by hieratic and austere forms of Byzantine influence.¹¹ He was also an exuberant personality who believed with all his heart in the historical role of the Romanian nation and its glorious past and future. Therefore, it comes as no surprise that Oscar Han was the one to present the document. Because of his artistic past and his beliefs, it is very much possible that he was 'used' either by the Union's leadership or by the higher echelons to introduce the document. It is also very plausible that the initiative was his and the leadership had to accept the presentation of the document. Regardless of the real way in which the document was pushed forward and of whose initiative was, the document had the rhetoric of a credo that was supposed to set an example. Han started by praising the period in which he was living because it offered him the chance to fulfil his artistic agenda which was in total accordance with the Party's

⁹ ASB, fond 2239, UAP, File 2/1971, *Minutes of the Plenary Meeting of the National Committee of the Romanian Artists' Union*, 4 May 1971.

¹⁰ This is the word used by the President of the Union when he announced the program of the second half of the meeting.

¹¹ Vasile Florea, *Arta românească modernă și contemporană* (București: Meridiane, 1982), 252.

program.¹² Furthermore, Han provided his own definition of art which introduced a first allusion to the need of representing the Romanian leader:

The art in perfect agreement with the social development, the art that flourishes in periods of economic and political prosperity requires the depiction of man, of [that man] who builds up the destiny of our entire people.¹³

Without being named, the reference to Ceaușescu (the man who builds up the destiny of our *entire* people) was rather obvious. After evoking his own creation, which was always focused on the representation of the great personalities of the Romanian history and culture, Han changed the tone of his speech to address a 'call' to his fellow artists to take advantage of the coming anniversary of the Party and to portray the leaders of contemporary Romania:

At this time when we are celebrating the fiftieth anniversary of the foundation of our Party, I want my works [...] to be a response to the call addressed to the artists as well as an expression of my feelings for those who laid the foundations of our Socialist Romania.¹⁴

Han refers to the speech that Ceaușescu delivered on the 10th of February, 1971, during a meeting with men of art and culture. This meeting is considered today as a preview of the July Theses, launched in the summer of the same year, because Ceaușescu spoke about the need to represent the new man, the constructor of Socialist Romania.¹⁵ Oscar Han practically took further Ceaușescu's call and urged

¹² 'I have reached more than ever a complete agreement between my own aspirations and the goals of our leaders. I have subscribed to the ideas presented by Comrade Nicolae Ceaușescu at various congresses and meetings because these ideas have been my credo all my life long.', ASB, *fond* 2239, UAP, File 2/1971, *Minutes of the Plenary Meeting of the National Committee of the Romanian Artists' Union*, 4 May 1971, 25.

¹³ Ibid.

¹⁴ Ibid, 26.

¹⁵ Nicolae Ceaușescu, *Cuvîntare la înfîlnirea cu oamenii de artă și cultură*, 10 februarie 1971 (București: Ed. Politică, 1971), 8.

his colleagues to depict the leaders of contemporary Romania, the constructors of the new society. The very end of Han's intervention is even more outspoken:

I am returning now to my studio not to resume old works but to complete a gallery of the representative figures of the moment. I am thinking of a series of portraits that will express my fundamental beliefs and feelings, my vision, [to work on the portraits of] our State and Party leaders to whom we owe the prestige of our country and I consider that it is my main duty to represent their faces and expressions, their character features and their visions in order [the portraits] to remain as true documents of the epoch that we are living in.¹⁶

Although Han refers to 'State and Party leaders' it is obvious who should be the focus of the artists' interest. Moreover, it is interesting to note that the first five years of propaganda of the Ceaușescu regime already bore fruit and that Ceaușescu's image as a visionary constructor of a new, glorious epoch was already established by 1971.

Han's speech was not followed by any discussion. The meeting continued with the typical talks about funds, exhibitions, etc. This awkward insertion of the 'document', its introduction by the President of the Union and its content, style and timing transform it into the first clear call that we came across to represent the leadership of the State and Party through artistic means. Over time, the statements of the artists became more and more artificial, praising Ceaușescu, underlining the artists' enthusiasm and desire to depict the leader, in other words, they started to sound exactly how the leadership expected them to sound. For instance, a statement made by the painter Eugen Palade on the occasion of the 1989 exhibition 'Epocă de aur' (Golden Age) goes like this:

¹⁶ ASB, fond 2239, UAP, File 2/1971, *Minutes of the Plenary Meeting of the National Committee of the Romanian Artists' Union*, 4 May 1971, 26.

Out of a sentiment of love and patriotic duty, I dedicated to Comrade Nicolae Ceaușescu, the great hero of our millenary lands, homage works of art, with the desire of eternalising significant moments of the great movement of building up our new socialist society.¹⁷

Ceaușescu's painted representations started to emerge at the beginning of the seventies and dwelled initially on Ceaușescu's image as an active leader, close to the people and receptive to their needs. It is not accidental that the first painting published in *Arta* was a 'work visit' realised in that specific manner. This image of Ceaușescu was soon to be complemented by his depiction as an official, remote president of the Republic who simply displays his attributes of power and lets himself be watched and admired. In the following pages, the evolution of Ceaușescu's painted representation will be scrutinised in an attempt to assemble his iconography. The investigation will focus on four iconographic themes whose internal dynamics and mutually shaping interactions will be analysed in detail.

The investigation will focus on four themes: *The Official Portrait*, *The Underground Communist Fighter / The Revolutionary Past*, *Work Visits*, *The Supreme Commander of the Army / Hero of Peace*. The majority of the paintings analysed in the following pages were researched in the National Office of Exhibitions, the institution that inherited from the Council of Culture and Socialist Education the paintings of Ceaușescu purchased by the State and which used to be displayed in Dalles Hall on the occasion of various anniversary exhibitions. Other paintings analysed in this chapter were published in *Arta* review and in the homage volumes issued on the occasion of Ceaușescu's birthday celebration. Nevertheless, there is a certain overlapping of material between these three sources in the sense that images published in *Arta* over time were gathered in the homage volumes that became more frequent towards the end of the regime. Most of the paintings representing Ceaușescu can be found today stored in the National Office of Exhibitions. Therefore, when details on the paintings analysed will be given in the

¹⁷ Eugen Palade, 'Epocă de glorie', *Scînteia*, March 28, 1989.

footnotes, no reference regarding the source will be made (which will be assumed as being the National Office of Exhibitions) unless the painting was published in *Arta* or in a homage volume. Conversely, when a painting that belongs to the fond of the National Office of Exhibitions was also found in *Arta* or in a homage volume, the publication of that particular image in different places will be mentioned in the footnotes.

5.1. The Official Portrait

To put together a repertoire of Ceaușescu's portraits is a very difficult task because there was a blurred boundary between what could be usually called an official portrait and the representations that had the appearance of a portrait, but were rather mixed with other themes and motifs. Whilst not being by far a phenomenon limited to Ceaușescu's case, it encompassed a more accentuated intermingling of themes than the classical Stalinist pattern. The reason for the occurrence of this phenomenon was a certain tension between different facets of Ceaușescu's public image promoted by the Romanian propaganda.

First of all, propaganda aimed at delivering an image of Ceaușescu as an active leader capable of implementing the principles of communism, of transforming the country's face according to the communist creeds. Therefore, the image of Ceaușescu as an omnipresent leader able to solve the most complicated problems that occurred in any field became the focus of Romanian propaganda. This was not only due to the personality cult *per se* but it had objective reasons too. Ceaușescu strove to expand and strengthen his relationship to the masses in order to obtain popular support for his ambitious, but hardly popular plans of industrialisation of the country. In this sense, it was necessary to fabricate a central figure, towards whom the popular enthusiasm to be channelled and then to re-direct this enthusiasm towards the big plans of modernisation of the country. Ceaușescu aimed at functioning as such a centripetal force capable of mobilising the masses.

On the other hand, the nationalist doctrine that gradually superseded the communist one required the construction of a powerful national figure that would have been able to embody the secular aspirations of the Romanian nation and to act as a coalescing force. For that reason, the image of Ceaușescu as the central figure of the national pantheon became a prominent one and its most frequent form of representation was that of a classical apparatus portrait which fully displayed the attributes of power. The balance between these two main facets of Ceaușescu's image was difficult to keep and more often than not they ended up overlapping. Although the iconography of Ceaușescu was mainly focused from the very beginning on his relationship to the masses – and in this sense the work visits were the most characteristic and well represented theme – his portraiture evolved towards a more static pattern that maintained the traits of the classical apparatus portrait. Especially in the early stages the influence of the votive portrait can be clearly traced and the motionless, hieratic posture characteristic for this type of portrait can be easily identified in Ceaușescu's official portraits.

Within the large theme of Ceaușescu's portraiture, two major types can be identified, namely the 'standard official portraits' and the 'mixed official portraits'. In the following pages we shall try to focus on the main features of these two groups and on the relationship between them.

The first group – the official portraits - attempted to render Ceaușescu in his highly official position. The schemes employed were several and drew both on established patterns of portraying a leader and on elements borrowed from modern media. The classical scheme of depicting a leader was that of a hieratic posture that simply displayed the attributes of power. From the emperors of the ancient world to the emblematic figures of the absolute sovereign in the pre-modern times - probably best represented by Louis XIV and Napoleon Bonaparte – the idea of the leader was conveyed through his depiction in a rigid pose, usually isolated or at an isolating distance from his led and underlining his distinct status through the displaying of the signs of power.

The pictorial representation of power evolved however over time especially as far as the display of power attributes was concerned. Whilst the figure itself maintained its stillness and rigidity, the environment around the leader was infused with 'power' and became a sort of envelope that encapsulated the leader. This envelope played a double role.¹⁸ It both 'protected' and 'defined' the leader. It 'protected' him because it acted as a sort of passage space between him and the viewer, between his dense 'otherness' and the 'common substance' of the external world. Furthermore, it 'defined' him because it usually encompassed attributes of power or simple objects that underlined a certain feature of the leader's personality. The images of Louis XIV or Napoleon in their studies or official rooms, with their personal and official objects around them, each of them attempting to underline a specific component of the leader's personality, are eloquent examples of the manner in which posture, attributes of power and space and objects around the leader converge in order to convey the idea of leadership, of otherness, of distinctness.¹⁹

In modern times, the 'envelope' around the leader transformed itself as well. It no longer comprised interior objects but 'opened' itself to enclose images and symbols that in a way attempted to better link the leader with his subjects. Especially in the representations of the leader produced within the former communist regimes, the 'envelope' was enlarged to encompass depictions of the achievements of the communist period that were purportedly made possible due to the leader's guidance. We deliberately use here the image of the 'enlarged envelope' and not that of the leader's transposition into a different space (outside his office or a closed space) in order to suggest the treatment of the space around the leader as an 'excrescence' of

¹⁸ Peter Burke, *Eyewitnessing The Uses of Images as Historical Evidence* (London: Reaktion Books, 2001), 69.

¹⁹ A very telling example for the idea enounced above is the classical painting by Jacques-Louis David entitled *The Emperor Napoleon in His Study at the Tuileries*. In this work, Napoleon is represented in his office standing up and gazing towards the viewer while the clock in the background is stuck at 4.15. In addition, the Code Napoleon is showed rolled on the table in the right. This arrangement aims at highlighting the idea of the emperor's dedication to his subjects: he worked all night long at drafting the Code whilst his led rested. See for the analysis of this painting Albert Boime, *Art in an Age of Bonapartism 1800-1815* (Chicago and London: The Univeristy of Chicago Press, 1990), 53.

the latter: a space precisely employed in order to define the leader, a space that was conceived as a continuation of the leader's persona and not simply as a background for his representation. The painting 'The Morning of Our Motherland' by Fyodor Shurpin is a case in point.²⁰ In this work, the fields, the machines, even the sky, far from being simple background for Stalin's representation, are elements that defined Stalin as a leader. The god-like depiction of Stalin was a reminiscent of the ancient hieratic pattern in which mediaeval rulers were rendered. In a way, Stalin's posture in this painting seems a little incongruous with the 'landscape' if the latter is not read as an extension of the leader's persona.

The official portraits of Ceaușescu followed practically the same lines. They started as replicas of the mediaeval rulers' portraits and evolved gradually towards a modern manner of conceiving the space around the leader. Nevertheless, Ceaușescu's figure maintained a hieratic aspect even in the most elaborated works. Furthermore, his representation was markedly flat, without volume, preserving a mediaeval pictorial style that recalled so much the mural painting of the Middle Ages. Perhaps the most representative apparatus portrait of Ceaușescu is that made by Corneliu Brudașcu²¹ (PLATE 14). It depicts Ceaușescu in the plenitude of his political power and it also shows how traditional schemes of representing the leader were absorbed and employed.

The painting was realised in 1978. In 1974 Ceaușescu set up the office of the President of the Republic and the investiture ceremony emulated the mediaeval ceremonial of confirmation of a new ruler. According to the recollections of his formerly close collaborators, Ceaușescu paid minute attention to the details of the ceremony²² which was widely presented in mass media.²³ The investiture of

²⁰ Matthew Cullerne Bown, *Art under Stalin* (Oxford: Phaidon, 1991), 178.

²¹ Corneliu Brudașcu, *Tovarășul Nicolae Ceaușescu* (Comrade Nicolae Ceausescu), 1978, *Arta* 11-12/1979.

²² 'The idea with the sceptre was Ceaușescu's and I remember that he inspired himself from history, if I am correct from Mihai Viteazul ['s example], the sceptre representing the symbol of power. The production of the sceptre was entrusted to the State Council and the Bureau of the Grand National Assembly, respectively to the president of the Grand National Assembly, Nicolae Giosan, who actually handed it to Ceaușescu at the ceremony. Historians and specialists in heraldic were

Ceaușescu as the 'first President of Romania' represented not only the definitive turning point in the establishment of Ceaușescu's personality cult²⁴, but also a return to visual, ceremonial and veneration patterns taken over from the mediaeval tradition.

This tendency was labelled by various scholars as Byzantinism and it was identified by the researchers of Romanian communism in the various ways power manifested, from the way power was conceived, shared and employed by the leadership in Romania²⁵ to that in which it was displayed through 'rites, processions and symbols'.²⁶ Furthermore, the cult of Ceaușescu itself was usually seen as perfectly moulded on the traditional Byzantine pattern and compared, in this respect, to the cult of his famous predecessor Stalin. For instance, Mary Ellen Fischer identified four characteristics of Ceaușescu's cult that she related to the above mentioned Byzantinism. They were, in her enumeration, the iconography, the inspired scriptures (the enormous number of books published by Ceaușescu that became obligatory reading, or at least works to be cited), an infallible leader and rituals of mass worship.²⁷ Whilst this assumption is very tempting and, in our opinion, valid, it should be noted that the above mentioned characteristics of Byzantinism can also be observed in the cults that developed within the Asian communist societies, which had nothing in common with the Byzantine tradition. Therefore, we think that the issue as a whole should be more closely investigated. This is not the place to even attempt such an investigation as the topic is one of huge complexity. Our purpose will be far more limited as we will focus only on iconography and on the way in which it relates to the Byzantine model. We argue here that, if a Byzantine pattern

consulted.', Rodica Chelaru, *Culpe care nu se uită, Convorbiri cu Cornel Burtică* (București: Curtea Veche, 2001), 204.

²³ The ceremony was broadcast and full descriptions of the event flooded the newspapers., *Scînteia*, March 28, 1974.

²⁴ Adrian Cioroianu, 'Cultul lui Ceaușescu: o surpriză?', *Dosarele istoriei*, No. 8 (72), 2002, 7.

²⁵ Vladimir Tismăneanu, 'Byzantine Rites, Stalinist Follies: The Twilight of Dynastic Socialism in Romania', *Orbis*, Vol. 30, No. 1, Spring 1986, 65-90

²⁶ Vladimir Tismăneanu, in *Romania: a case of dynastic communism* (New York: Freedom House, 1989), 6.

²⁷ Mary Ellen Fischer, *Nicolae Ceaușescu, A Study in Political Leadership* (Boulder & London: Lynne Rienner Publishers, 1989), 160.

left its mark at all upon the way communist cults were constructed, then the best way to identify it is through the analysis of visual images. Ceaușescu's iconography actually offers a few striking examples of taking over and adapting mediaeval patterns, especially votive portraits and icons.

Brudașcu's painting represents Ceaușescu in a frontal position, his head slightly turned towards the right of the image. His body is projected onto a red background and, although it has a certain volume and solidity, it gives nevertheless the sensation of imponderability due to the fact that its margins are a little blurred and the lower part of the body is totally effaced. Basically Ceaușescu's body is not delimited in the lower part of the picture by the painting's margin but fades away somewhere over the bottom line. The leader is dressed in a dark, official suit and fully displays the attributes of power, the sceptre in his right hand and the three-coloured sash over his shoulder. He gazes outside the image but he does not have the 'direct look'; he does not look back into the viewer's eyes.

Most of the elements pinpointed above show a contamination with the pattern of the mediaeval votive portrait. The frontal, hieratic posture is reminiscent of the representation of the medieval ruler which usually aimed at stressing the complete identification of the personage represented with the appearance under which he was represented.²⁸ In other words, this frontal representation is the sign of a strict delimitation and, consequently, exteriorisation of the personage represented. He claims and assumes his position and gives it a palpable base through the total display of his power ('I am who I am').²⁹ The imponderability of the personage represented (idea conveyed through his projection on a neutral background and the lack of a clearly delimited lower base) is again a basic feature of the votive portrait. The outside yet unfocused gaze on the viewer is another characteristic of the way mediaeval rulers were represented in their votive portraits. In the old mural paintings, the 'absent gaze' of the ruler was a sign of his detachment from the

²⁸ Meyer Schapiro, 'Frontal and Profile as Symbolic Forms', in *Words and Pictures - On the Literal and Symbolic in the Illustration of a Text* (Paris: Mouton, The Hague), 1973.

²⁹ *Ibid.*, 44.

mundane existence, a token of his re-positioning towards and commitment to a higher authority, that he had reaffirmed through the foundation of a church devoted to God.

In Ceaușescu's representations, this gaze should be interpreted as part of the official posture. It speaks of self-sufficiency, of the display of power and less of the need for confirmation through the viewers' eyes. It also indicates a withdrawal in a sort of power conceived as separate from the subjects upon whom it exerts itself. It is hard to say precisely to whom this conception of power belongs: to the artist or the leader? Or is it the result of 'collaboration' between the two? Most probably, the second hypothesis is the correct one: Ceaușescu disseminated a certain conception about power through the various public manifestations or rituals constructed around his persona;³⁰ artists, in their turn, bombarded with this avalanche of events, images and rhetorical devices, were forced into finding visual solutions that best conveyed the idea of a detached, somehow remote yet authoritative power. The use of mediaeval visual patterns was probably considered the best solution, not to mention the easiest, to follow.

One additional element in this painting that could be considered a taking over from the classical votive painting is the tricolour flag that hangs above Ceaușescu. Although curtains and draperies hanging in the background were something common in the studio portraits representing monarchs all over Europe, the flag in the case of Ceaușescu's portrait cannot be taken as a reminiscent of this kind of monarchical accessories. This would be a remote inspiration for the Romanian culture as, up to the 19th century, the mural painting was the only medium used in the Romanian Principalities and the apparatus portraits realised in a Westernised manner after that moment were very rare indeed. Moreover, the flag hanging above Ceaușescu's head did not have a decorative purpose at all. It was employed by the painter as a device of power legitimization. Therefore, the source of inspiration for

³⁰ The ritual of investiture in the position of President of Romania was only one episode in a long series of ritualised and ceremonial political events. For more on this issue see chapter I.

Ceaușescu's portrait – both in terms of morphology and conception – should be sought probably in the votive portrait. Whilst in the mediaeval votive portrait the ruler legitimated himself through the agency of an angel hovering above him or by the hand of God himself who made a sign of benediction – both manners of representation trying to suggest that the power of the ruler came directly from God – in Ceaușescu's representation the power came from the Romanian people, represented here by the ultimate symbol of the country, the Romanian flag. The employment of the flag as a substitute for the nation and an indicator of an official position will be further identified in other examples throughout this chapter.

The official portraiture of Ceaușescu also developed a different direction. Apart from the depiction of Ceaușescu as the holder of ultimate power, painters also attempted to represent within the same image the leader's relationship with those on whom he exerted his power. Doru Rotaru's work entitled simply *Omagiu* renders Ceaușescu in a posture very much alike to that we have seen in Brudașcu's painting³¹ (PLATE 15). The same frontal, hieratic position, the same inclination of the head towards the right of the image, the same 'absent gaze' and the same display of power attributes³² indicate that a clearly delimited heroic image of Ceaușescu gradually emerged that was further circulated and placed in different visual contexts. In this particular case, the heroic image of Ceaușescu – accentuated here by an unrealistically broadened torso, brought well into foreground and which covers most of the image – is projected against a backdrop of disparately sketched scenes that give the impression of a hectic activity behind the tutelary silhouette of the leader.

The scenes represent people engaged in different activities, the background being practically divided into two different parts: the left part of the background comprises images of workers, especially builders engaged in the construction of the new

³¹ Doru Rotaru, *Omagiu* (Homage), 1978. Published in *Omagiu* (Bucharest: Ed. Meridiane, 1983).

³² The display of the sceptre as an attribute of power made some journalists to speak about the shaping of Ceaușescu's public image in accordance with a royal pattern. See for this Dan Ionescu, 'A Touch of Royalty', January 22, 1985, Open Society Archives, *fond* 300-60-1, box 705.

socialist reality; the right part depicts soldiers while they perform activities of surveillance or while they effectively seem to stand against an invisible enemy. A soldier with a gun in his hands is depicted right behind Ceaușescu. The soldier is encapsulated in a sort of luminous circle. Although not individualised (the features of his face are effaced) he seems to reproduce, by the manner he holds his arms, Ceaușescu's own position. He stands there as an alter-ego of Ceaușescu as if he wants to underline the fact that the leader is the true guarantor and defender of peace and stability in Romania. The relationship between the two is further reinforced by the depiction of a second circle that seems to encompass both Ceaușescu and the soldier. This type of representation, while it circulates a heroic, official image of Ceaușescu which seems to have crystallised shortly after the middle of the seventies³³, endeavours as well to make room for a different type of image of Ceaușescu – that of the leader related to the masses. The relationship is not depicted in a vivid, direct way as was the case in some of the work visit scenes produced around the same date. It rather resembles the 'patronising relationship' that exists in the above cited work by Fyodor Shurpin, *The Morning of Our Motherland*. Like Stalin there, Ceaușescu has an iconic appearance, practically supervising and presiding over the whole activity in the country. Furthermore, the painting hints at a different theme that would become more visible at the beginning of the eighties, namely the theme of Ceaușescu as defender of peace and national interests.

Yet another scheme employed to render Ceaușescu both under an apparatus portrait appearance and as a leader connected to the masses was one that borrowed extensively from the so-called biographical icon elaborated in the Byzantine space, especially in the 13th and 14th centuries. The mediaeval biographical icon centrally depicted Christ or a saint surrounded by small scenes from his life, whether miracles or martyrdom ones.³⁴ Eftimie Modâlcă employs this scheme in a painting of Ceaușescu that makes it one of the most palpable examples of the influence of

³³ The painting was a 1978 commission for Ceaușescu's 60th birthday.

³⁴ See for a discussion of this type of icons Henry Maguire, *The Icons of their Bodies, Saints and their Images in Byzantium* (Princeton, New Jersey: Princeton University Press, 1996), 173.

mediaeval and icon art upon the production of Ceaușescu's painted images³⁵ (PLATE 16). In Modâlcă's work, Ceaușescu is centrally depicted as a fully frontal torso against an unclear background that seems more like an historical ruin (?) than a congress hall or a presidium.³⁶ He maintains the same highly official posture although, in this picture, he does not hold the sceptre but wears the *Star of the Republic*³⁷ insignia on his suit. The gaze is outside the image but still unfocused on the viewer.³⁸

Around the central image of Ceaușescu, there are six images of which only two are in fact representations of the leader. The first representation of Ceaușescu, if we read the scenes in a clockwise direction beginning with the right-hand corner, as in the mediaeval biographical icons, is one in which the leader is depicted in an emblem-like manner: a reproduction after a well known photograph of Ceaușescu is placed against the red flag of the party whilst three roses (pictured there as a socialist token or simply as an offering³⁹) are placed at the bottom of the image. The other image in which Ceaușescu is represented is the last in the series, the one at the top of the painting. It shows Ceaușescu while he gives a speech in front of a large crowd during one of his numerous work visits around the country. Basically only these two images correspond to the classical biographical icon in the sense that they are the only ones to present the 'deeds' of the personage represented: Ceaușescu as a young communist revolutionary and Ceaușescu as a guiding light and theoretician. The rest of the scenes depict the popular enthusiasm of the masses towards Ceaușescu through the simple visual device of converging gazes and moves (the

³⁵ Eftimie Modâlcă, *Omagiu* (Homage), 1977. Published in *Omagiu* (Bucharest: Ed. Meridiane, 1983).

³⁶ Maybe the painter deliberately opted for this kind of background in order to underline an a-temporal dimension that was so specific to the icon, the pattern employed in this representation of Ceaușescu.

³⁷ The decoration was issued by Ceaușescu himself on the occasion of his investiture in the position of President of the Socialist Republic of Romania, on March 28, 1974.

³⁸ As we have seen in the first chapter, Ceaușescu was often praised in verses that had a strong religious tonality. His painted representations that incorporated visual schemes employed in church or icon painting demonstrate that this was a general trend within his cult. See for this Dan Ionescu, 'Religious Elements in the Glorification of Ceaușescu', January 28, 1988, Open Society Archives, *fond* 300-60-1, box 706.

³⁹ If the flowers were employed here as an offering to Ceaușescu, the iconic subtext of the image is even more openly underlined.

machines' and people's moves together) towards the leader. A strong link establishes between the central image and the lateral ones through the agency of these devices. The lateral images, if read according to the spirit of a biographical icon, should be seen as Ceaușescu's own achievements: those people work enthusiastically because the leader inspired them, they live happily because the leader offered them the necessary conditions, etc. In a way, this visual scheme was a perfect device to alter Ceaușescu's 'biography' from a private into a public affair, to link it inextricably with the destiny of the country.

In the second half of the seventies a new direction in Ceaușescu's iconography emerged. It focused on the forging of a space for him within the national pantheon, on linking him with a carefully selected line of past Romanian rulers. As we have seen in the previous chapters, this trend occupied an important space within the official ideology, being practically one of the main co-ordinates on which Ceaușescu's cult developed. His own speeches and writings, the officially orchestrated stadium performances, the numerous volumes produced in order to glorify the national past and its links with the contemporary period contributed all to the establishment of an adulterated view upon the past that aimed at carving a distinct place for Ceaușescu and his epoch in the national history. Therefore, along with the imposing of Ceaușescu's image as the *Conducător* (The Leader) of the Nation, as a remote and a-temporal figure, a new direction surfaced which aimed at conferring a messianic aura to Ceaușescu by presenting him as the utmost embodiment of a long and illustrious lineage of Romanian leaders, as the one who best incarnated the most valuable qualities unevenly scattered among past historical figures.

Constantin Piliuță's 1977 work – briefly mentioned in the first chapter - visually illustrates this tendency (PLATE 2). It became one of the emblematic pieces within Ceaușescu's iconography and was widely displayed and circulated years after its

completion.⁴⁰ This is even more surprising as Piliuță was not a 'court painter', a regular presence in the anniversary exhibitions. After a personal exhibition in 1960 which was critically received by art critics,⁴¹ Piliuță also started to produce works of art on historical topics which concretised in a series of paintings devoted to the 1907 peasant uprising or in works depicting personalities of the Romanian history (Mihai Viteazul, Tudor Vladimirescu). The painting representing Ceaușescu is part of this chapter in Piliuță's creation, a necessary concession to the dominant trend in the art production of the time. His style changed completely from the beginning of the 1980s on, in the sense that his favourite themes became landscapes (especially winter landscapes where the predominant colour was white), female portraits (sometimes feminine nudes), flowers, in other words, topics detached from the immediate (political) reality.⁴²

In the painting representing Ceaușescu, the Romanian leader is depicted in the already known presidential posture, with the sceptre, the sash and *The Star of the Republic* fully displayed. He is no longer rendered in a frontal position but in a pose heavily disseminated through newspapers: Ceaușescu standing in front of the official tribune while he gives a speech. In point of fact, his posture is more ambiguous; although he stands in front of the tribune⁴³, he is not giving a speech. He rests his left hand over a piece of paper (not a bunch of papers as it should have been if he were really depicted while or after giving a speech) in a gesture of endorsement of his own words and of the Party documents in general.

⁴⁰ It was initially commissioned for the 60th birthday celebration of Ceaușescu and firstly published in the homage issue no. 10-11/1977 of *Arta* with the title *Omagiu* (Homage). The image was also published in *Arta* 8/1987 with the title changed in *Eroii neamului* (Heroes of the People). Other title used for this painting was *Întîiul Președinte* (The First President).

⁴¹ According to the minutes of the meeting in which 'the Piliuță case' was debated, it was considered that the artist did not correspond to the requirements of that epoch, his style being indebted to the clichés of the Romantic bohemia whereas his works depicted too much the tough, unpleasant aspects of reality. Cf. *Adevărul literar și artistic*, October 29, 1995.

⁴² Alexandru Cebuc, *Constantin Piliuță* (Bucharest: Ed. ARC 2000, 2002), 14-18.

⁴³ The lower part of the painting tries to sketch a well-known image: that of a Party Congress Hall. The desk with the communist symbols, the sickle and the hammer, encircled by the wheat ears and the capitals P.C.R. (*Partidul Comunist Român*/Romanian Communist Party) at their top and the floral arrangement were the common inventory of a festive Party Congress day.

The idea of endorsement is reinforced by the presence of a gallery of Romanian leaders⁴⁴ in the second upper half of the painting. The leaders seem both to attend and to credit what happens in the lower part of the image. Apart from the above mentioned idea, the rulers represented there played yet another role. They provided Ceaușescu with legitimacy; they were there to remind the viewer that Ceaușescu's place was among them; that he, as they had done once, would fight for the defence of the country's interests; that, through his actions, he had already secured his place in the Romanian national pantheon. One small detail highlights this idea of continuity between the past rulers and Ceaușescu. Mihai Viteazul, the leader of Walachia who managed the ephemeral unification of the three Romanian Principalities in 1600, is represented right behind Ceaușescu. In a rigorous chronological order Mihai Viteazul should have been represented the forth in line after Ștefan cel Mare. But as we have already hinted at in a few places in this work, Ceaușescu had a special admiration for Mihai Vitezul whom he saw as the perfect embodiment of the Romanian leader and whose actions and ideals tried to emulate and follow (achievement of unity, maintenance of territorial integrity, etc). Therefore, the representation of Mihai Viteazul right behind the image of Ceaușescu is a visual reinforcement of an idea already circulated through Ceaușescu's speeches or mass-media.

One more interesting aspect about this painting is the style in which it was realised. Even for a person who is not accustomed to the Romanian mediaeval mural painting, the style of this painting is obviously very striking. Not only are the rulers represented in niches that reproduce the space and registers of the church painting but they are also rendered - as the entire work in fact, except perhaps the flowers in the very foreground - in a flat style very much similar to that which had been used in the Romanian mural painting up to the 19th century. Thus, Piliuță's work became

⁴⁴ The leaders depicted are, from the left to the right of the image, Burebista, the king of the 'first unitary and centralised Dacian state', Mircea cel Bătrîn (1386-1418), *voievod* of Vallachia, Mihai Viteazul (1593-1601), the unifier of the Romanian Principalities in 1600, Ștefan cel Mare (1457-1504), *voievod* of Moldavia, Alexandru Ioan Cuza (1859-1866), the first ruler of the united Principalities of Moldovia and Vallachia in 1859 and Nicolae Bălcescu, the leading figure of the 1848 Revolution.

emblematic for at least two reasons. It remarkably represented the central idea of the Romanian communist propaganda constructed around the leader, namely Ceaușescu's image as defender and guarantor of the country's interests and continuer of the great national tradition. Moreover, it did so in a form that fully concurred with the composition's idea: Piliuță's style is an obvious taking over from the mediaeval mural painting, a style so much praised and encouraged by the official propaganda.

One of the ideas implied in Piliuță's painting, namely that of Ceaușescu as theoretician and guiding voice on the road of communism, gradually gained consistency and crystallised in a sub-theme of its own. What is worth noting is that the stress was put on Ceaușescu as the 'adapted-to-life-theoretician', as the down-to-earth leader, able to put into practice his ideas, a practical thinker as opposed to the stiff, cold and ultimately un-influential type. Whilst volumes of his speeches and writings began to emerge from the middle of the seventies on and literally flooded the market in the eighties⁴⁵, his iconography maintained the image of an applied theoretician who guided his people towards communism rather than produced works that would be estranged from the real life. This idea was visually materialised through the depiction of Ceaușescu while he gave a speech as opposed to him writing a book or sitting at a desk. He was never represented, as far as my research could determine, writing or even holding a book in his hand.⁴⁶ He was rather shown as a leader capable of galvanising masses, of inspiring and 'positioning' them onto the right direction.

⁴⁵ The word 'flooded' is an adequate description of what happened in the eighties in Romania. Not only were his books displayed in every single bookshop in the country, were the bookshops' windows arranged to look like some sort of altars devoted to him, but no competition was allowed to enter the arena. Probably one of the funniest things that happened in a country that theoretically was advancing on the road to communism was that the works of the founding fathers of communism, Marx, Engels and Lenin, could not be found in the Romanian libraries in the eighties. Additionally, even the mentioning of Marx in speeches and writings became 'an act of insubordination'. , cf. Ion Ianoși, *eu și el, Însemnări subiective despre Ceaușescu* (Cluj-Napoca: Ed. Dacia, 2003), 85.

⁴⁶ This was actually a visual attribute of Elena Ceaușescu who was usually depicted holding a book in her hand as a token of her commitment to and achievements in the scientific world.

Radu Solovăstru's work illustrates this idea⁴⁷ (Figure 7). It is an interesting piece of work for at least two reasons. First of all it shows the intimate relationship that existed between Ceaușescu's photographs circulated in journals and his painted image. Not only does Solovăstru's work employ photography as a source of inspiration for his portrait, but it reproduces down to the smallest details a certain photograph of Ceaușescu, one taken while he was delivering his speech at the closing session of the National Conference of the Romanian Artists' Union in 1978. The posture, the spotted tie, even the wrinkles of the coat are faithfully rendered. Secondly, Solovăstru's work makes use of a visual device that was extensively employed by Soviet artists in paintings and posters representing Lenin and Stalin, namely the juxtaposition between a huge hovering leader over a crowd of small, hard to distinguish people.

As for the first aspect of Solovăstru's work, it raises a couple of questions. First of all why photography was so extensively employed in Ceaușescu's iconography? It was due, of course, to a general tendency characteristic for the art produced in the communist regimes that favoured the realist depiction of reality.⁴⁸ 'Truthfulness' was considered as one of the essential ingredients of this type of art for it favoured its smooth and un-equivocal reception by a larger audience.⁴⁹ The recourse to

⁴⁷ Radu Solovăstru, *Conducătorul* (The Leader), 1978.

⁴⁸ The method of using photographs as a source of inspiration was already known in the Soviet Union, from the early twenties: 'It is not less symbolic that Isaak Brodskii, a former pupil of Repin and one of the founders of Socialist Realism was the first artist to make use of photographs on a large scale. His vast canvases of Party congresses and speeches given by leaders depicted dozens, even hundreds of individual figures with the detail of portraits. At the end of the twenties the term 'Brodskii-ism' was coined as a synonym for 'photographism'.', in Igor Golomstock, *Totalitarian Art in the Soviet Union, the Third Reich, Fascist Italy and the People's Republic of China* (London: Collins Harvill, 1990), 179.

⁴⁹ The notion of 'truthfulness' and the associated concepts such as accessibility and comprehensibility received wide attention from both the initial theoreticians of the socialist realist method and from Western scholars who later analysed the phenomenon. See for the initial discussions around the notion of 'truthfulness' *Socialist Realism in Literature and Art A Collection of Articles* (Moscow: Progress Publishers, 1971). For the latter interpretations see Regine Robin, *Socialist Realism. An Impossible Aesthetic* (California: Stanford University Press, 1992) and C.Vaughan James, *Soviet Socialist Realism, Origins and Theory* (London: The MacMillan Press Ltd., 1973). For a discussion on 'truthfulness' in painting and on the relationship between painting and photography in the Soviet art see Brandon Taylor, 'Photo-Power, Painting and Iconicity in the First Year Plan', in *Art and Power, Europe under the Dictators 1930-1945* (London: Thames and Hudson, 1996).

photography as a source of inspiration for the painted images became therefore a constant throughout the history of the socialist realist art. In Romania, apart from this general tendency, the use of photography in Ceaușescu's portraiture became a necessity as Ceaușescu was not in the habit of sitting for a portrait. During the early years of his rule, he used to invite artists and writers to accompany him during his work visits across the country. Writers were supposed to describe such touching episodes as the enthusiastic welcome that people gave to Ceaușescu, the special bond that established between the leader and the led, Ceaușescu's capacity to listen to people's various problems and his eagerness to find solutions to their problems. In their turn, artists were expected to produce sketches of all these and to use them further in their final compositions.⁵⁰ This indeed worked when painters aimed at realising the types of compositions described above and, as we shall see further, painters sometimes acknowledged in writing a particular moment as a source of inspiration for a specific painting. Nevertheless, making sketches in a permanently changing setting and of a subject in continuous move was a far more difficult task.

Funnily enough, this incongruity was occasionally acknowledged by some artists and apparently used as an excuse for not proceeding with the completion of a portrait. Corneliu Baba, one of the most interesting 20th century Romanian painters, was a portraitist *par excellence*, active both before and after the war. Although he did not produce works in a socialist realist vein, he was nevertheless 'used' by the official establishment due to his realist portraits of peasants and workers. Invited by Ceaușescu to attend one of these work visits in order to produce sketches for a future portrait of the leader, he declared at the end of the visit that he was unable to make any satisfactory sketches because Ceaușescu was permanently on the move. As he firmly declared that he could not work without preliminary sketches taken during a sitting session and Ceaușescu probably found that a waste of time, Baba

⁵⁰ See for the impact that such visits apparently had upon artists the description of a work visit at the Galați industrial unit. Alexandru Ciucurencu, 'Un moment de nobile semnificații sociale', *Scînteia*, July 19, 1968, 1. Art critics and historians were part of these groups as well. They were supposed to describe these visits and to encourage artists to take artistic advantage of these opportunities. See for such an article the description given by the art historian Ion Frunzetti, 'Inimi și flori în Valea Jiului', *Scînteia*, August 13, 1968.

was able to avoid having to produce a portrait of Ceaușescu. This funny and almost unbelievable episode resembles the more famous case of the skilful refusal of Vera Mukhina to produce a sculpture of Stalin. The Soviet leader wanted Mukhina to realise his sculpture, but the renowned artist responded that she could not do it without initially making sketches of Stalin. Stalin refused to pose for her and Mukhina was able to avoid the commission. It is not certain yet whether the artists (Mukhina and Baba) knew that the leaders would not sit and used their bold demands in order to avoid producing their representations.⁵¹

A second question that should be raised is *how* photography was employed? Besides the accurate reproduction of photographs described above, they were also employed as quotations within paintings. The quotation could be a simple insertion of a photograph or a more complex narrative constructed through the employment of more than one image. As we shall see further in this chapter this procedure gave birth to works that had an air of modernity or at least seemed different from those that realistically depicted the leader. The device used in Solovăstru's work - and this leads us to the second interesting issue about this piece - was one with a consistent career in the first years of the Soviet rule. Russian avant-garde artists, committed to the cause of the Revolution, began to use photomontage in order to produce posters that would encapsulate the idea of change, mobilisation and enthusiastic march towards a new, better future. The photomontage's fractured lines, the un-balanced and, at the same time, complementary distribution of parts within the image transformed it into a proper medium for representing the political, social and cultural transformation through which the Soviet Union had been going. Furthermore, photomontage was an excellent vehicle to render visually the relationship between individual and collectiveness, a relationship so central for the emergence and development of the leader cult in the communist regimes.⁵² Even

⁵¹ Matthew Cullerne Bown implies that Mukhina knew that Stalin would refuse her request and used it in order to avoid the commission., Matthew Cullerne Bown, *Socialist Realist Painting* (New Haven & London: Yale University Press, 1998), 234.

⁵² See for an excellent study of the evolution of photomontage in the Soviet Union from avant-garde to socialist realism Margarita Tupitsyn, *The Soviet Photograph 1924-1937* (New Haven and London: Yale University Press, 1996)

though fragmentation as an artistic tool was later labelled an avant-garde procedure and, as a consequence, theoretically blamed, it proved to be much too useful to be eliminated.⁵³ The sharp contrast between fragmented and organic representation, characteristic for the period of historic avant-garde, diminished over time. Nevertheless it survived even in the period when the representation of reality in its entirety was praised. It became an indispensable tool in order to depict an absent, constructed reality as, in fact, the socialist one was. Moreover the process of fragmentation transcended the strict medium of photography and was later utilised in easel painting at the moment when the principle of 'wholeness' became a necessary criterion to follow. The huge figure of the leader floating above masses of anonymous people originates in the avant-garde experimentalism, more precisely in the attempts made in the field of photography and photomontage in the first three decades of the twentieth century. Translated into easel painting, it became one of the most used devices in order to render the relationship between the leader and the masses.

The theme of the official portrait evolved over time. Towards the end of the seventies and especially in the eighties, Ceaușescu's official image followed again a particular line. From a very official depiction that placed the emphasis on the attributes of power and the attitude of the leader, Ceaușescu's image evolved towards a total split from reality that reached almost schizophrenic nuances towards the end of the eighties. It is strange to notice that Ceaușescu's isolation and withdrawal from reality actually was sensed and visually captured by some of the artists sensitive to the evolution of the Romanian reality. This proves that the development of Ceaușescu's image, whilst consistent with the ideological tendencies dictated from the very top, registered nevertheless alien influences and it was the result of different converging factors. The alteration from the official image

⁵³ "There were at least two principal formats: one, based on fragmentation, viewed reality as a disconnected and puzzling space; the other leaned toward whole images and saw the world as a concrete and continuous entity. These two different representational strategies correspond precisely to critic Peter Burger's important contrast between traditional and avant-garde artists. According to Burger, traditional artists create organic works designed to give 'a living picture of the totality', while avant-garde artists make works that are "no longer created as an organic whole but put together from fragments."", Ibid, 67

of Ceaușescu to that of an isolated, withdrawn leader had a few phases which are worth mentioning further. In point of fact, the word 'phases' is probably not the best to use here, as they were not at all linear. They spread over longer periods of time and they usually co-existed. Perhaps we should speak instead of different visual devices employed by artists that made Ceaușescu's image move into a certain direction.

A first such scheme was that of depicting Ceaușescu against a 'neutral' backdrop that would induce an air of a-temporality and give a feeling of non-connection with the outside, concrete world. Such a scheme was employed for instance by Sabin Bălașa in his portrait of Ceaușescu entitled *Omagiu* (Homage)⁵⁴ (PLATE 17). Although Ceaușescu still wears the tri-coloured sash he is even more remote from the potential viewer in this painting than he was in the ones described above. Not only does he not look towards the viewer, but he seems engaged in a form of extra-terrestrial rapture that impedes any concrete connections with potential onlookers. The lack of any concrete detail in the background and the strange light that seems to descend from above accentuate the feeling of detachment. The painting was published for the first time in *Arta* at the end of 1977 in an issue devoted to the forthcoming anniversary of Ceaușescu's 60th birthday (January 26, 1978). The image was accompanied by a short laudatory word by the author himself. One phrase read:

His vast opera is the opera of a great and daring visionary, a communist visionary of the ideal of our nation, powerful and far-reaching, projected into the future.⁵⁵

Therefore, the painting could be read as illustrating this feature of Ceaușescu's constructed image, the one which draws on the leader's visionary capacity, his ability to design big plans and a better future for the Romanian people. The painting

⁵⁴ Sabin-Bălașa, *Omagiu* (Homage), 1977. Work commissioned for the 60th birthday celebration of Ceaușescu.

⁵⁵ Sabin Bălașa, *Arta* 10-11/1977.

could also be seen as a surrealist version of a classical votive portrait in the sense that the feeling of a-temporality so specific to the latter can be easily sensed in Bălaşa's work as well. In addition, the blue that Bălaşa used is precisely the blue that had been employed in the mural decoration of the churches from the North of Moldavia and this can be again seen as an allusion to the votive portrait.

On the other hand, all these elements should be interpreted in the context of Bălaşa's work as a whole. The style that he used when he represented Ceauşescu is so characteristic for this artist (the atmosphere, the typology, the colours, etc) that it cannot be said that Bălaşa forced himself to represent the Romanian leader in a way that respected certain requirements or directions from outside. If we believe the declarations made by the artist after 1989, he accepted the commission on his own terms: a big amount of money and non-intervention in the process of producing the work.⁵⁶ In other words, Ceauşescu wanted a portrait by Bălaşa (a painter with a singular, easily identifiable style) and he had to accept the conditions. We do not know whether things happened exactly as Bălaşa declared, but what is beyond any doubt is that he worked Ceauşescu's representation in such a way that he was totally truthful to his well-established style.

A different device that developed in the eighties and which once again induces a feeling of withdrawal and un-connectedness with other people is that of depicting Ceauşescu (in fact the presidential couple) in a 'half relationship' with his led. Eugen Palade represents Nicolae and Elena Ceauşescu in a 1985 painting entitled *Salutul preşedintelui către ţară* (The President's Salute to the Country) in a gesture of open greeting towards an invisible audience⁵⁷ (PLATE 18). Four years later

⁵⁶ Bălaşa made these declarations after 1989 in various television broadcasts. He underlined that the presidential couple wanted him to make their portraits and he accepted a commission for two paintings (the second one representing the Ceauşescus together will be analysed later in this chapter) for the amount of 200.000 lei (for comparison, for a work of similar dimensions and depicting an industrial landscape, for instance, the Council of Socialist Culture and Education was paying an amount that could range from 25.000 to 40.000 lei).

⁵⁷ Eugen Palade, *Salutul preşedintelui către ţară* (The President's Salute to the Country), 1985. The work was also published under the title *Omagiu* (Homage).

Palade realised a similar piece⁵⁸ (PLATE 19). Differences are minimal: Nicolae Ceaușescu is represented while he salutes the crowds (the gesture is slightly less enthusiastic, denoting perhaps an older, more tired leader? He has greyer hair than in the 1985 painting); Elena Ceaușescu is indeed transformed in this painting. She has a different hairdo and she looks much older, but otherwise her depiction falls within a well-defined stereotype: she stands right behind her husband (although not as much screened as in the 1985 painting – they are represented here as equal partners); she is represented as the feminine pole of the couple (white outfit, no flowers this time); she benevolently smiles. What is nevertheless interesting about these two paintings are the gazes of the two leaders. They do not look in the same direction: whilst Nicolae Ceaușescu looks directly to the viewer in both paintings, Elena Ceaușescu looks to the right and left, respectively, and the sensation given by these distributive gazes is that they try to cover a large crowd. The feeling of isolation of the two leaders is somewhat diminished by the way Palade manages to construct his composition. Trained as a graphic artist but also taking painting classes in the studios of two well-known interwar artists (Nicolae Dărăscu and Eustațiu Stoenescu), Palade learned from his maestros the importance of light (Nicolae Dărăscu was a promoter of neo-impressionism in Romania) and drawing in a painting (Stoenescu had a predilection for domestic scenes, portraits and still painting realised in a classical yet warm manner).⁵⁹ The lessons of his professors were reinforced during a short stay in the Soviet Union in 1969 where he was exposed to the rigorous Soviet style in terms of drawing and composition.⁶⁰ As a consequence of these various influences, Palade shows a sensibility for light and surface, for the materiality of colour, for rigorous compositions and the volume of the figures represented. Furthermore, a certain feeling of peace, satisfaction or even happiness can be detected in his painting. All these distinctive traits of his style can be easily identified in the paintings devoted to the presidential couple, which were

⁵⁸ Eugen Palade, *Tovarășul Nicolae Ceaușescu și tovarășa Elena Ceaușescu* (Comrade Nicolae Ceaușescu and Comrade Elena Ceaușescu), 1989.

⁵⁹ Vasile Florea, *Artă românească modernă și contemporană* (Bucharest: Meridiane, 1982), 176, 184–185.

⁶⁰ Octavian Barbosa, *Dicționarul artiștilor români contemporani* (Bucharest: Meridiane, 1976), 376.

probably the most rigorous in terms of composition and peaceful and warm as to of the feeling they transmitted.

However, the device employed – that of not representing a crowd responding to or acclaiming the Ceaușescu – is, in my opinion, very strange. Ceaușescu was a leader who loved being acclaimed by crowds. Presumably he would have been happy to see this acclamation transposed into visual images. Newspapers were, for example, very careful to show this outpouring of popular admiration towards the presidential couple: they published almost always photographs that encompassed both the official tribune and the applauding masses. Hence, the fact that towards the end of the eighties Ceaușescu was more and more represented alone (or only with his wife) but in hypostases that still suggested interaction should account for an alteration in the artists' perception of Ceaușescu. Ceaușescu's final physical weakness and especially his total estrangement from the people, his functioning only in an obsolete rhetoric that had no tangency with the Romanian reality were perceived as such by artists who, maybe involuntarily, let this reality permeate their works. On the other hand, Ceaușescu's perception of himself, after so many years of mass adulation, was totally deformed; he really absorbed and believed in his image as created by the propaganda. He also became gradually saturated with and impervious to the forms of mass adulation. The meetings he was addressing in the final years, where his numberless portraits (and his wife's) were facing back to him (her), obscured the masses and created a mirror effect that further reinforced his own image.⁶¹ Therefore, it is not perhaps surprising that artists started to represent Ceaușescu alone, without reference to any adulatory people and that Ceaușescu himself seemed to have had no complaints about it.

Complementary to the type of image described above, in which the Ceaușescus were represented in a mock dialogue with their ruled, a different visual scheme was employed in the eighties which basically failed again to convey the desired idea of

⁶¹ See for a similar point ('Ceaușescu talking to himself') Silviu Brucan, *Generația irosită, Memorii* (București: Ed. Univers & Calistrat Hogaș, 1992), 121.

connection and dialogue and, curiously enough, did not manage to depict the masses' enthusiasm towards their leader. For the 70th birthday celebration of Ceaușescu, Vasile Pop Negreștean realised a painting that purportedly aimed at rendering the popular love and admiration that the Romanian leader enjoyed⁶² (PLATE 20). The scheme he used manages instead to portray Ceaușescu again as an isolated leader. Negreștean depicts Ceaușescu in the very foreground of the painting, the right hand raised, the left in an uncertain movement, gazing indecisively outside the painting. Well behind him, at a considerable distance, he represents an acclaiming crowd. The problem with this scheme is that the idea of dialogue and connection between the leader and the ruled is from the very beginning severed. Whilst the ruled can watch their leader, the latter feels no need to respond to their acclamation. Furthermore, the very idea of acclamation is perverted by the small size, indistinctiveness and remoteness of the adulators. We cannot read in this image any signs of admiration on the faces or in the attitudes of the people.

There is an enormous distance between this type of representation and the way the same idea is conveyed in the paintings devoted to Stalin. Let us take for example a painting that was realised for Stalin's 70th birthday, *Glory to the Great Stalin* by Iu. Kugach, V. Nechitailo and V. Tsyplakov.⁶³ Stalin is represented centrally, unscreened, distinctively dressed, but by no means disproportionate when compared to the other figures in the painting. Even more importantly, he becomes the central point of the entire composition through the converging attention and adulation that all and each one of the people represented in the picture bestow on the leader. They look at Stalin in a 'visible' form. We can see their expressions, we can feel their admiration. In this painting, Stalin was definitively the acclaimed Leader. By contrast, Ceaușescu looks like a lonely leader, disorientated and with no capacity to connect to the people anymore.

⁶² Vasile Pop Negreștean, *Zi de sărbătoare* (Day of Joy), 1987.

⁶³ For an interesting analysis of this painting see Lars Erik Blomqvist, 'Some Utopian Elements in Stalinist Art', in *Russian Review*, Vol. 11, Summer-Fall, 1984, 301.

An even further phase in the portraying of Ceaușescu as an estranged leader was reached by two artists, Ion Bitzan and Vladimir Șetran. They usually worked together towards the production of big compositions in which they used photomontage.⁶⁴ These compositions more often than not represented Ceaușescu at different moments during a work visit. In the middle of the eighties they produced - separately this time - a few bizarre works that depicted Ceaușescu as an estranged, even alienated leader who seemed unable to interact at all. As the paintings are very similar we shall discuss them as a group. Two of them are made by Ion Bitzan⁶⁵, the third by Vladimir Șetran⁶⁶ (PLATES 21, 22 and 23). The particularity of all these works primarily consists in Ceaușescu's awkward gestures and un-static pose that are in sharp contrast with the established posture of the leader in general and with the manner in which Ceaușescu was previously represented when he was depicted alone. Depicted while he was saluting the audience after he gave a speech (Bitzan, 1986), or while he was saluting a crowd (Șetran), or simply in a hard to define activity – walking towards something, trying to lift his hand and point to something (?) (Bitzan, 1984) -, Ceaușescu is in all these paintings completely isolated, projected against blank surfaces (apart from the flags in Bitzan, 1986, and Șetran) that further emphasise the sensation of remoteness and mock dialogue with an invisible audience.

Ceaușescu's official portrait evolved somehow asymptotically but nevertheless in accordance with the development of his own personality cult. Ceaușescu was initially represented in a hieratic, solemn form that embodied the idea of supreme, unchallenged authority, displaying totally his attributes of power (Brudașcu – PLATE 14, Modâlcă – PLATE 16). This type of image evolved, as we have seen above, towards the depiction of an estranged, withdrawn leader (Bitzan – PLATE 21, Șetran - PLATE 23), alone even in the scenes in which apparently adoring crowds were represented (Negreștean – PLATE 20). His initial hieratic posture gave

⁶⁴ Magda Cârneci, *Artele plastice în România, 1945-1989* (Bucharest: Meridiane, 2000), 89.

⁶⁵ Ion Bitzan, *Omagiu tovarășului Nicolae Ceaușescu* (Homage to Comrade Nicolae Ceaușescu), 1984 and Ion Bitzan, *Omagiu tovarășului Nicolae Ceaușescu* (Homage to Comrade Nicolae Ceaușescu), 1986.

⁶⁶ Vladimir Șetran, *Tovarășul Nicolae Ceaușescu* (Comrade Nicolae Ceaușescu), 1986.

space to disordered gestures and to complete isolation (Bitzan – PLATE 22). Stalin's image evolved as well towards isolation after the World War II but his isolation was of a different kind. It would be probably more adequate to speak about Stalin's separateness as he was depicted apart from the other characters represented within the painting.⁶⁷ When represented alone, as he usually was, he did not lose his 'coherence'. His static pose had weight, his monumentality was palpable. Therefore, the evolution of Ceaușescu's official portrait was quite distinct and very telling for the evolution of his personality cult in general. Furthermore, it shed light on the degraded relationship between the leader and the led and on the manner in which artists managed to capture in these particular images the general schizophrenic atmosphere existing towards the end of the regime.

5.2. *The Underground Communist Fighter / The Revolutionary Past*

The dynamic of Ceaușescu's iconography followed the development of his cult. Once his cult grew and his image evolved towards that of a perfect leader, new themes were elaborated in order to round up his public image. Moreover, the gradual isolation of the leader in a mythological reality coupled with the official propaganda prevailing trend towards mastering the historical past led to the attempt of shaping Ceaușescu's past as well. Like in the cases of almost all the other communist leaders before Ceaușescu, Romanian propaganda followed the pattern of re-writing the leader's past and constructed it so as to encompass the salient features of an irreproachable communist profile. Ceaușescu, as the utmost embodiment of Party activism in Romania, gradually seized both the political scene and the historical past. His revolutionary activity was sketched out following the common lines of the communist underground fighter myth, which were instead exacerbated and made to sound faultless. Ceaușescu became the revolutionary *par excellence* pushing into background other real or previously constructed revolutionary

⁶⁷ For instance, *Stalin on the Cruiser 'Molotov'* by Viktor Puzyrkov or *There is a Metro!* by Aleksandr Gerasimov., Matthew Cullerne Bown, *Art under Stalin* (Oxford: Phaidon, 1991), 176.

figures.⁶⁸ The process of removing any potential adversaries in the mythological sphere was total. Unlike Stalin who employed Lenin's image as a revolutionary in order to construct his own revolutionary past, Ceaușescu demolished from the very beginning the cult of his political predecessor, Gheorghe Gheorghiu-Dej, and downplayed drastically the images of other lesser revolutionaries. Whilst a stereotyped image of Lenin was maintained as a background symbol even in the years when Stalin cult was fully developed, Ceaușescu dominated the scene alone from the very beginning.

The written form preceded the visual representation of this facet of Ceaușescu's public image. In 1973, when the first big reverential volume was published, the myth of Ceaușescu's revolutionary youth was entirely shaped.⁶⁹ In the visual sphere, the representation of this theme appeared later, in the first half of the eighties and was particularly employed in the second half of the decade. Nevertheless, in the reverential volume mentioned above (published in 1973), in the chapter entitled 'Messages from Unions, Institutions and Cultural Organisations', there was a message from the Artists' Union that stressed precisely this facet of Ceaușescu's image. The message said textually:

We see in you, beloved comrade Ceaușescu, the absolute embodiment of the ardent communist fighter, of the patriot who devotes his entire life, energy and creative capacity to the carrying out of the noblest ideal of mankind: Communism.⁷⁰

⁶⁸ Sorin Șerban, in his study about the evolution of the underground communist fighter's myth in communist Romania, maps the ways different State institutions contributed to the singling out of Ceaușescu as the quintessential revolutionary. For instance, he notices that the series entitled *Evocări* (Evocations), which appeared under the auspices of the Institute of Historical and Social-Political Sciences from 1968 to 1979, published between 1974 and 1979 only three biographical studies. In the Annals review of the same Institute there were published only fourteen articles about other underground fighters during a period of ten years (1974-1984), most of them being commemorative ones. The number of studies devoted to Ceaușescu-the underground communist fighter was twenty-four out of eighty-nine between 1974 and 1979, whereas it increased to eighty-four out of one hundred-sixty between 1979 and 1984., Sorin Șerban, 'Ilegaliștii', in *Miturile comunismului românesc* (Bucharest: Nemira, 1998), 145.

⁶⁹ *Omagiu* (Bucharest: Editura Politică, 1973). The volume appeared on the occasion of Ceaușescu's 55th birthday celebration.

⁷⁰ *Omagiu* (Bucharest: Editura Politică, 1973), 116.

The only possible explanation for this temporal discrepancy could be that each theme was used according to what propaganda aimed at expressing at a certain moment. In the first years Ceaușescu was more concerned to channel a dynamic type of image that showed him working hard for the implementation of communism in Romania. Later on, when his credibility and commitment started to diminish, the only solution was to take refuge into a kind of image that corresponded better to his final megalomania and absurd discourse. The image of the communist fighter offered the perfect occasion for a projection in an *illo tempore*, where any mythical construction was possible. To write and re-write a past for which historic data were not enough and usually contradictory became the favourite activity of the Romanian propaganda. The visual images on this theme appeared in the eighties in the atmosphere of full amplification of the myth of the communist fighter and aimed at coalescing and explicitly connecting all the features of this facet of Ceaușescu's image.

As we have seen in chapter 1, three moments were singled out and further chiselled in order to establish Ceaușescu's credentials as a revolutionary: the 1936 trial in Brașov, the admission into the Romanian Antifascist Committee, and his role in the demonstration that took place in Bucharest on May 1, 1939. These moments were analysed in chapter 1 as part of the general process of building up Ceaușescu's cult and as an attempt to master the past for his own benefice. In this chapter the focus will be placed on the way artists graphically drew on such thin evidence as Ceaușescu's revolutionary past, what solutions they adopted to develop a theme that was obviously more vague than that of the work visits for instance and how the 'shapelessness' and 'remoteness' of the episodes described above allowed artists to come up with artistic solutions that would have been otherwise treated as artistic experiments.

The myth of the underground communist fighter crystallised in five cliché-sequences.⁷¹ These are the following: hard life, yearning for learning, initiation into the Party, revolutionary by profession and, eventually, heroic death. Apart from the last one,⁷² all sequences became part of Ceaușescu's image as a revolutionary, a special emphasis being put on the first and the third. The theme of hard life had a salient importance in the development of the revolutionary myth because it allowed a negative depiction of the old regime and offered an excellent ground for explaining Ceaușescu's early involvement in communist activities. The theme stressed the entire range of inequalities that had been purportedly common practice in the 'bourgeois-landowners' (*burghezo-mosieresc*) regime and, consequently, the historical necessity for change. The need for enlightened leaders, willing as well as able to change the existing system, was the adjacent point targeted when this motif was employed. Ceaușescu was portrayed as such a leader, and the visual representations of this theme underlined precisely this aspect. On the other hand, this sequence was designed in order to point out the fact that, in spite of hard living conditions, man in general (Ceaușescu in particular) was able to surpass his initial status, to fight for and to improve his situation. In other words, that spectacular achievement could and should be used by others as an encouragement and an example. With this educative feature we enter the realm of full contamination of Ceaușescu's underground fighter myth with a religious-like model. The model value of the underground fighter's myth is similar only to the power of the medieval saint's *exemplum* that could be followed without any reticence. In this sequence is also present the image of the poor, dark, cold house that achieves some warmth only by the presence of a united family.⁷³ The image of the poor house would be later used in the construction of Ceaușescu's cult as the quintessence of his poor origin but, at the same time, of his spectacular determination to overcome and ameliorate his initial status.

⁷¹ Sorin Șerban, *op. cit.*, 146.

⁷² If a post 1989 biography of Ceaușescu from a communist standpoint were written, his death would be certainly perceived as a heroic one as Ceaușescu affirmed his communist creeds until the last moment of his life. Reportedly he sang the International before he was shot.

⁷³ According to Sorin Șerban, the image of the poor house is an omnipresent item in the reconstruction of the first years of the lives of the revolutionaries. Sorin Șerban, *op. cit.*, 136.

On the other hand, Ceaușescu's innate qualities, manifest from an early age, are emphasised: courage, power and patience to endure unfairness of life and an acute sense of rightness.⁷⁴ His revolutionary activity began precociously, at the age of eleven, when fully conscious of the regime's unfairness, he left his native village trying to find a job in Bucharest. The years spent learning a handicraft would make him even more aware of the necessity of change. This is why at the age of fourteen he participated in the 'powerful workers' demonstrations and strikes'.⁷⁵ His moment of revolutionary glory as a young communist was his participation in the Conference of the Antifascist Fighters as a representative of the democratic youth. Not only did he participate but he was also elected as a member of the National Antifascist Committee. And all this at the age of only fifteen! This year is also the moment of his first confinement, only the prelude of a long series of unjust arrests and, even more importantly, the time when he enrolled in the Communist Youth Union.⁷⁶ The period that followed was characterised by an important revolutionary activity that culminated in 1939 with his election as a member of the Central Committee of the Communist Youth Union and with the organisation of the famous antifascist manifestation that took place the same year in Bucharest. All this activity contributed to conferring Ceaușescu the aura of an omnipresent revolutionary, full of dynamism and abnegation, good organiser, entirely devoted to the revolutionary creeds. These were also the years when Ceaușescu discovered the Marxist-Leninist writings and eagerly read and learned the teachings of the founding 'fathers of socialism'. This sequence is a mandatory one in the biography of any communist positive hero and it normally involves assistance from 'an older and more

⁷⁴ There is also a testimony for the existence of these qualities, namely the memoirs of his sister Elena. This is a strange parallelism with the memoirs of Lenin's sister which probably were used as a model for the rewriting of Ceaușescu's childhood. For the memoirs of Lenin's sister see Nina Tumarkin, *Lenin Lives! The Lenin Cult in Soviet Russia* (Cambridge, Massachusetts, and London: Harvard University Press, 1983), 26. For those of Ceaușescu's sister see *Omagiu* (Bucharest: Ed. Politică, 1973), 11.

⁷⁵ *Omagiu* (Bucharest: Ed. Politică, 1973), 9.

⁷⁶ The list of arrests is long. He was imprisoned - according to his official biography - at Craiova in 1934, Doftana in 1938, Jilava, Caransebeș, Văcărești and the antifascist camp from Tîrgu-Jiu, from where was released at the end of the war by Soviet troops.

“conscious” communist figure’.⁷⁷ In Ceaușescu’s case there was no trace of an individual figure who would have played the role of the older communist, the one who would have initiated Ceaușescu into Marxist-Leninism. Not even Gheorghe Gheorghiu-Dej - the old communist who really acted as a tutelary figure in the communist prisons and with whom Ceaușescu had a relationship that was usually described as a master-disciple one - was mentioned in the official biography of Ceaușescu.⁷⁸ The phrase used in the official biography of Ceaușescu was that he learned everything he needed to know in the communist prisons which were real ‘universities in Marxist-Leninism’.⁷⁹ Overall, this construction had the goal of demonstrating the old revolutionary credentials of Ceaușescu, of over-justifying his position over years and of shaping a prototype of revolutionary leader that would be largely circulated.

The iconography of Ceaușescu-the communist underground fighter did not closely follow the theme as it was elaborated by the official propaganda. Apart from the first (hard life) and the fourth (revolutionary as profession) sequences, the theme did not receive full coverage. It is symptomatic for the way Ceaușescu’s image was constructed that the sequences that would have presented Ceaușescu as a still unaccomplished person and revolutionary (during the process of learning) or in a relation of subordination to other individual (initiation into the Party by an older revolutionary) were completely ignored by artists. To my knowledge, there are no representations of Ceaușescu as a schoolboy or a teenager in need of absorbing other peoples’ teachings. The attempt to provide an entire *vita* did not go as far as to spoil Ceaușescu’s image as an individuality who did not need to rely on other people at any moment of his life. Unlike Lenin who was represented as a child and a

⁷⁷ Katerina Clark, *The Soviet Novel, History as Ritual* (Chicago and London: The University of Chicago Press, 1985), 167. See also for the topic of the positive hero Regine Robin, *Socialist Realism, An Impossible Aesthetic* (California: Stanford University Press, 1992).

⁷⁸ Pavel Câmpeanu, *Ceaușescu: anii numărătorii inverse* (Iași: Polirom, 2002), 56. Moreover, Dej’s contribution was totally ignored even within the events where he played the leading role. Such a moment was the railmen’s strike at Grivița in 1933 when Gheorghiu-Dej was one of the main organisers of the strike., George Ciorănescu, ‘The ‘Red Grivița’ Anniversary: Another Revision of Romanian Party History’, February 17, 1983, Open Society Archives, Fond 300-60-5, Box 8.

⁷⁹ *Omagiu* (Bucharest: Ed. Politică, 1973), 17.

gymnasium pupil⁸⁰ or Stalin who began by being depicted as a child eager to educate himself,⁸¹ Ceaușescu, when represented as a teenager at all, was already a leading revolutionary in the midst of full action.

The sequence of 'hard life' was graphically represented through the depiction of Ceaușescu's birth home. As we have seen in chapter 1, Ceaușescu's birthday place occupied a special place within the official propaganda. Not only was his village Scornicești the object of an outpouring of laudatory verses, documentaries⁸² and archaeological discoveries that would hint at the involvement of Ceaușescu's alleged ancestors in important historical events, but Ceaușescu himself felt the need to visit it periodically (especially on his birthdays). These visits were widely covered in the press and photographs of the Ceaușescus paying homage to the parental graves in the cemetery of Scornicești were published in *Scînteia*. Another interesting aspect of this veneration of Ceaușescu's birthday place was the fact that the appearance of his native house was maintained in the original form. Although it was transformed into a museum, nothing similar to Stalin's monumental museum in Gori⁸³ appeared in Scornicești that would have spoiled the original image of the village. The option of preserving the initial appearance of his native house as well as the numerous photographs of him and his parents (dressed with their 'Sunday clothes' but obviously having a peasant look) circulated both in the Romanian journals, homage volumes and books published abroad, bear no testimony of the

⁸⁰ Nina Tumarkin, *op. cit.*, 102.

⁸¹ David D. Gabitashvili, 'The Thirst for Knowledge', 1953, in Matthew Cullerne Bown, *Socialist Realist Painting* (New Haven & London: Yale University Press, 1998), 235 or Dmitri Nalbandyan, 'The Great Youth (Young Stalin)', 1951, in Gleb Prokhorov, *Art under Socialist Realism, Soviet Painting 1930-1950* (Craftsman House, 1995), 11. On the whole, there are nevertheless differences between the ways the two leaders are represented as youngsters. Stalin was more often depicted as 'dreamy or rebellious, whereas images of the young Lenin emphasised his intellectual brilliance', Matthew Cullerne Bown, *op. cit.*, 240.

⁸² Periodically there were published articles that underlined the exceptional achievements registered by the people of Scornicești in different fields proving that the exceptional character and determination of the village's 'most beloved son' was spreading over his co-villagers too. For instance the agricultural cooperative in Scornicești won in 1983 its third title of Hero of Socialist Labour (Ion Andreiță, 'Al treilea titlu de Erou al Muncii Socialiste', *România Liberă*, April 23, 1983) or the textile factory of the village gained the first price in the confections industry competition ('Locul întâi: Întreprinderea de confecții Scornicești, județul Olt', *România Liberă*, April 23, 1983)

⁸³ Robert Tucker, *Stalin in Power, The Revolution from Above, 1928-1941* (New York, London: W. W. Norton & Company, 1990).

desire to deny his humble origins but, on the contrary, they underline the overcoming of the initial disadvantages and the achievements registered in-between. Moreover, Ceaușescu's desire of maintaining the myth of a humble origin, of having simple, honest and hard-working parents translated also into the refusal of creating mini-cults around his parents. Apart from the praising of his mother in verses that would stress her role in giving birth to the greatest hero of Romania,⁸⁴ nothing similar to what happened in other bastardised communist regimes occurred in Romania.⁸⁵

It is not surprising therefore that the native house became the focus of artists' interest. As in many other cases, the source of inspiration for this theme were the photographs published in journals and taken precisely on the occasions of the presidential couple's visits in Scornicești. Adrian Dumitrache's painting titled *Casa părintească* (Native Home) is a case in point⁸⁶ (Figure 3). It represents Nicolae Ceaușescu along with his wife standing tranquilly and cheerfully in the porch of Ceaușescu's native home.⁸⁷ This image can be read in different ways. A first very interesting meaning of the image can be deciphered by paying attention to the way the painting was disseminated in journals. As we have seen in chapter 1,⁸⁸ Dumitrache's work was inserted in *Arta* review in a very indicative way for the meaning that the painting wanted to convey: the contrast between the Ceaușescus' humble origin and their later achievements. The painting was placed between two images representing Nicolae and, respectively, Elena Ceaușescu in their most representative and honouring hypostases: Nicolae Ceaușescu as the 'royal president' of Romania, Elena Ceaușescu as the world famous scientist (Figure 4). The

⁸⁴ See chapter 1, page 35-36.

⁸⁵ See for instance the case of Saparmurat Niyazov, the current president of Turkmenistan, who allowed that streets, factories and hospitals be named after his parents' names or statues representing them be erected in the squares of several towns., Avdy Kuliev, 'The Dictator with the Personal Touch', *Transitions*, Vol. 4, No. 6, November 1997, 60.

⁸⁶ Adrian Dumitrache, *Casa părintească*/Native Home.

⁸⁷ Although, as far as we know, there are no paintings of Elena Ceaușescu's birthday place, her village became an object of 'journalistic attention' in the second half of the eighties. See Anneli Maier, 'Visiting Petrești, the Place where the Ceaușescus' Romance Began', September 25, 1986, Open Society Archives, *fond* 300-60-1, Box 700.

⁸⁸ See pages 38-39.

exemplum value of this syntax is obvious; the Ceaușescus' determination and inner qualities made them achieve that much; the communist system for which they had fought and to whose development they fully contributed offers equal chances to those who want to overcome their condition through hard work and determination.

The image of the two leaders in front of the house, smiling serenely towards the viewer, might convey yet another meaning. The theme of the perfect family, understood both in the large sense (Romania as the big family, Nicolae and Elena Ceaușescu as the Parents of the Nation) and in a smaller but equally important one for the official propaganda (the presidential family as example of happiness and endurance, Nicolae Ceaușescu as a family man) clearly surfaces from this image. These two facets of Ceaușescu's personality (Ceaușescu, the Father of the Nation⁸⁹ and Ceaușescu, the family man) were largely circulated in the press and usually they intermingled or reinforced each other. For instance, photographs that showed Ceaușescu while he was involved in domestic activities with his sons and daughter⁹⁰ (playing chess, for example, with his youngest son, Nicu) began to be published in the homage volumes that appeared from 1973 on. These photographs were published in the section 'In the family' and furthermore reinforced the interference between the motif of Ceaușescu, the father of the family and Ceaușescu, the Father of the (Romanian) People. Therefore, the image of the native house is a poly-semantic image as there were many of those produced and circulated in the eighties. It defines at least three facets of Ceaușescu's constructed public image (Ceaușescu, the revolutionary who overcame the hardship of life and Ceaușescu, the father of the

⁸⁹ Whilst verbal propaganda promoted the image of Ceaușescu as the son of the nation ('the most beloved son of the nation' was probably the most emblematic verse circulated in the period), visual images did not focus on this aspect. Ceaușescu was always represented in a paternal, patronising guise that excluded his depiction in a subordinating posture. This resembles the way Stalin was depicted, always as a paternal figure. In contrast, Kim Il Sung, for instance, was visually represented both as the father and son of the nation. *Kim Il Sung, Legendary Hero for All Ages* (Pyongyang: Foreign Languages Publishing House, 1978).

⁹⁰ A humanisation of the leader through the circulation of 'private' photographs was operated in the cases of Stalin and Hitler as well. For instance, an album of photographs entitled 'Hitler, as nobody knows him' presented the Führer as a semi-private person, while he was strolling, privately discussing with his friends or even laughing. Jan Plamper, 'The Hitlers Come and Go..., the Führer Stays: Stalin's Cult in East Germany', in Klaus Heller and Jan Plamper (eds.) *Personality Cults in Stalinism – Personenkulte im Stalinismus* (Göttingen: V&R unipress, 2004), 309.

people and the family man) and together with the theme of Ceaușescu, the friend/father of children and Ceaușescu, the hero of peace, it accounts for a 'socialist paternalism' that was part of the more general nationalist doctrine of the regime.⁹¹

The theme of the native house evolved towards simplification; in time it was enough to represent only the house in order to convey both the idea of the leader's social evolution and that of paternal protection towards his people. A serene representation of the house during spring communicated the ideas of transformation, potentiality and balance and it accounted for Ceaușescu's presence even when he was not physically there, for his capacity of permeating people and things with his beneficent touch⁹² (PLATE 24). The iconic quality of this type of image, that speaks about a person when he/she is not represented – in the case of icons because the unseen cannot properly be depicted, in the case of Ceaușescu because there is no longer need to represent the well-known and omnipresent – makes it resemble those paintings that speak about Stalin through the imprint he left upon people's souls and faces.⁹³ A similar idea, this time not regarding the concrete works but concerning the process of creation of Ceaușescu's portrait, is expressed by the painter Dan Hatmanu in a very telling way. In an attempt to describe the way in which he had realised a portrait of the Romanian leader he stressed precisely Ceaușescu's non-physical presence but permanent lingering into people's minds/memory that helped him to catch his true spirit:

Trying to do an oil portrait of Comrade Nicolae Ceausescu after various photographs I realised that I had big difficulties. Then I abandoned the

⁹¹ Gail Kligman, *The Politics of Duplicity - Controlling Reproduction in Ceaușescu's Romania* (London: University of California Press, 1998), 28.

⁹² Viorel Mărginean, *Primăvara* (Spring), 1978. The painting was commissioned for Ceaușescu's 60th birthday celebration.

⁹³ Jan Plamper cites two such examples (Pavel Sokolov-Skalia. *The Voice of the Leader* and Dmitry K. Mochalsky. *After the Demonstration, They Saw Stalin*) where Stalin is actually present only on the faces of the soldiers listening to Stalin's speech on the radio and on those of the children who return from a parade where they saw Stalin., Jan Plamper, 'The Spatial Poetics of the Personality Cult, Circles around Stalin', in Evgeny Dobrenko and Eric Naiman (eds.). *The Landscape of Stalinism, The Art and Ideology of the Soviet Space* (Seattle and London: University of Washington Press, 2003), 43.

photographs and I continued to work based on memory. I felt how the personality of this special man began to emerge; I saw him in my mind, because I was carrying him in my mind as we all do, as he himself also carries us all, the indestructible link between the people and the leader being in this way realised.⁹⁴

Although these words were published on a festive occasion and as a homage to Ceaușescu and, therefore, their genuineness is questionable, they are nevertheless interesting as an indicator of the way painters thought they should articulate their discourse on the creative process of the leader's portrait. The lack of concrete visual props to depict the leader, the idea that he is so much present in the minds and lives of his led and, reversely, that he 'carries' all of them in his mind account for an almost erotic relationship established between two unequal parts (they carry Ceaușescu in their minds, whilst he carries them all; the god-like dimension of Ceaușescu is obvious here). Furthermore, the process of creation of Ceaușescu's portrait as described by Hatmanu, places the former in the category of those who have their portraits realised based on an idea rather than on physical resemblance. Like the *voievozi* of the past, Ceaușescu is the embodiment of certain principles, qualities, ideals whose depiction is more important than that of his concrete physical features. Through this process he is already perceived as part of the gallery of past rulers whose iconographies were set following ideas and not physical resemblance.

The greatest part of Ceaușescu's representations as a communist revolutionary focuses on his participation in the antifascist and anti-imperialist demonstration of May 1, 1939. As underlined in chapter 1, Ceaușescu's involvement in the 1939 demonstration was a pure counterfeit. Not only did he not play the role ascribed to him by the official propaganda, but the entire purpose of the demonstration was altered and a demonstration which was actually organised by the royal dictatorship in support of the national-socialist regimes in Germany and Italy became a

⁹⁴ Dan Hatmanu, 'Omagiu', *Arta* 10-11, 1977, 10.

communist protest against fascism.⁹⁵ The lack of any visual evidence that could have been used as a basis for producing paintings on this specific theme gave birth to totally stereotyped images. The construction of this episode started with the editing of the photographs that began to be circulated on this topic. Like in the Soviet Union, where a massive intervention upon photography had taken place, especially after the moment of the great purges,⁹⁶ doctored photographs for pure aesthetic purposes or with the goal of re-writing a historical event emerged during the Ceaușescu regime. The editing of Ceaușescu's public image was a complex process that encompassed both the intervention on all TV screenings/newsreels⁹⁷ and the editing of photographs that were published in newspapers.⁹⁸

Furthermore, his image suffered also more brutal interventions that aimed at rewriting the past, at manufacturing revolutionary credentials, ultimately at carving a place for him (and his wife) within past political events. Such an intervention was that which aimed at transforming the Ceaușescus into participants in the alleged 1939 antifascist demonstration. A photograph of the event was edited in order to give space to the two Ceaușescus. The intervention is pretty obvious and it does not need further commentaries. Well known portraits of the Ceaușescus were pasted clumsily in a sea of people and the caption of the photo, as it was published in a homage volume that appeared in 1989, reads: 'The Great Antifascist, Antiwar and Antirevisionist Demonstration of May 1, 1939, in which Comrade Nicolae

⁹⁵ Mihai Sturdza, 'A New Episode in the Personality Cult', June 16, 1989, Open Society Archives, fond 300-60-1, Box 706.

⁹⁶ David King, *The Commissar Vanishes The Falsification of Photographs and Art in Stalin's Russia* (New York: Metropolitan Books Henry Holt and Company Inc., 1997).

⁹⁷ 'All of Ceaușescu's involuntary pauses, hesitations, stutters and grimaces had to be removed before anything could be shown and all discarded snippets of film were collected by the *Securitate* and destroyed.' Edward Behr, 'Kiss the hand you cannot bite', *the rise and fall of the Ceaușescus* (London: Hamish Hamilton, 1991), 157.

⁹⁸ 'Nicolae Ceaușescu's portraits had the wrinkles removed before they were allowed to be published in *Scînteia* [...] Ceaușescu was a short man ... [and] photographs ... [of him] at the airports with foreign dignitaries were always taken from a shortened angle to make sure that he looked as big as or bigger than the other person.', Peter Burke, *Eyewitnessing The Uses of Images as Historical Evidence* (London: Reaktion Books, 2001), 73. Similarly, the American ambassador in Romania noted in his book of memoirs about the period he spent in Bucharest between 1981 and 1985 that the huge portraits carried at demonstrations 'showed' 'usually a twenty year younger person, with his hair black not grey'. David B. Funderburk. *Un ambasador american între Departamentul de Stat și dictatura comunistă din România, 1981-1985* (Constanța: Ed. Dacon, 1994), 114.

Ceaușescu and Comrade Elena Ceaușescu Played a Decisive Part'.⁹⁹ The awkwardness of this photograph not only consists in the obviously defective insertion of the two leaders' portraits,¹⁰⁰ but also in the employment of old photographs that had already been independently used before. Moreover, it was strange that this photograph, showing the two 'protagonists' to a considerable distance from each other, was circulated in a period when paintings devoted to the 1939 demonstration were already elaborated.

The paintings, in contrast, depict the Ceaușescus as the focus of the image, the other figures being used only to stress the centrality of the two leaders. Both of them are represented in very stereotyped postures: marching forward¹⁰¹ (PLATE 25), sometimes with their fists clenched¹⁰² (PLATE 26) or encouraging people to follow them¹⁰³ (PLATE 27). A more dramatic posture is that in which Nicolae and Elena Ceaușescu are represented as already recognised leaders in the centre of the image whilst the other participants encircled them and seemed to listen to the words that Ceaușescu apparently uttered¹⁰⁴ (PLATE 28). They also seem ready to follow the Ceaușescus and to ascribe to them totally the leadership of the demonstration. In most of them, Elena Ceaușescu wears the same dress, a white blue-spotted one, a sort of 'revolutionary uniform', as it was copied from one of her images that the propaganda most diligently had circulated: the standard image of Elena Ceaușescu as a young communist underground fighter (Figure 8). Moreover, in most of them she has flowers in her hands as a symbol of their quest for peace in the protest demonstration they organised. The flowers might also suggest (along with her white dress and his rebel hair) the Ceaușescus' youth and romantic revolutionary ethos¹⁰⁵

⁹⁹ *Sub flamuri de august, Album omagial de artă plastică dedicat aniversării a 45 de ani de la Revoluția de Eliberare Socială și Națională, Antifascistă și Antiimperialistă de la 23 August 1944* (București: Meridiane, 1989).

¹⁰⁰ N. C. Munteanu, 'Fotografiile trucate ale epocii Ceaușescu', May 13, 1985, Open Society Archives, *fond* 300-60-1, Box 705.

¹⁰¹ Valentin Tănase, *Unitatea întregului popor în jurul partidului* (The Unity of the Entire People around the Party), 1989.

¹⁰² Ion Șinca, *I Mai 1939* (May 1, 1939), 1988.

¹⁰³ Mihai Mănescu, *I Mai 1939* (May 1, 1939), 1989.

¹⁰⁴ Vintilă Mihăescu, *I Mai 1939* (May 1, 1939), 1989, *Arta* 5/1989.

¹⁰⁵ Eugen Palade, *I Mai* (May 1), 1986.

(PLATE 29). Nevertheless, in another painting on the same subject, Elena is represented having a different look (the most striking dissimilarity being the fact that she has longer hair). This observation is interesting as regards the imposing from above of a certain pattern of representation of this episode. It is obvious that it sought to establish a certain pattern through the circulation of standard photographs of the two leaders. Nevertheless things seem to have been loose enough so as to allow the production of visually different versions on a topic for which propaganda struggled to produce solid primary evidence.

One particular image is in striking contrast with the rest of those representing Ceaușescu as a demonstration leader¹⁰⁶ (PLATE 30). It depicts him as a teenager, in an arresting posture, his right fist clenched,¹⁰⁷ his eyes staring directly towards the viewer.¹⁰⁸ Palade represents here in fact the canonical image of Ceaușescu as a communist underground fighter for no concrete historical reference is made in the title of the painting (it is called simply *Communist Demonstration*) and no placards hinting at the purpose of the demonstration are depicted in the work. The obviously very young age of Ceaușescu and the impossibility of his participating in a demonstration at that early age transform the painting into a totally fictitious setting and establish a kind of iconic image of Ceaușescu, the communist underground fighter. He is there to embody the revolutionary leader *par excellence* whose distinctive features are overemphasised in this painting: activeness,¹⁰⁹

¹⁰⁶ Eugen Palade, *Demonstrație comunistă* (Communist Meeting), 1986, Arta, 6/1986.

¹⁰⁷ This posture resembles that in which Kim Il Sung was depicted as a young revolutionary leader (fist clenched, cap grasped in his hand, marching forward followed by the others). See for this type of representation the homage volume *Sous la bannière des grandes idées de djoutché du camarade Kim Il Sung, A l'occasion du 60ème anniversaire de la naissance du camarade Kim Il Sung, Grand Leader* (Pyongyang: Editions en Langues Etrangères, 1972).

¹⁰⁸ This is one of the few paintings in this series in which Ceaușescu stares so boldly outside the image. Apart from Tănase's and Mihăescu's works, where Ceaușescu looks to the viewer, the other paintings depict him as an aloof leader which makes the images seem slightly choreographic and without a precise temporal delimitation. In addition, in all paintings in this series, without exceptions, Elena Ceaușescu is depicted as totally remote and dreamy, only as a presence besides her (future) husband.

¹⁰⁹ As we could notice in Ceaușescu's representations as a communist revolutionary, the accent was put on his depiction as an active participant to the demonstrations and meetings that he attended. The same applies for the case of Stalin. In the 1940 official biography (*Kratkaia biografiia*, Moscow, 1940) Stalin was described as an 'active participant' to the IV Congress of the RSDLP held in Stockholm in 1906. An identical phrase was used to characterise his participation to the V Congress

determination, power of irradiation and deep faith in the communist creed. Palade's style is very particular again and leads to one of the most sincere and touching representation of Ceaușescu. The artist combines a very rigorous drawing of Ceaușescu's figure with a graphic depiction of the other personages in the painting. In addition, the treatment of Ceaușescu's face in terms of colour (very careful to reinforce the volumes and angles of the face) contrasts with the almost monochrome silhouettes of the people in the background. The way in which Palade treats the surface contributes a lot to the individualisation of Ceaușescu within the painting and transforms this portrait into one of the most powerful representations of the Romanian leader.

A different aspect of Ceaușescu's revolutionary activity that was picked up by artists were his trials and imprisonment terms. Although Ceaușescu spent a period of six years in prison, artists chose to focus on his role in the 1936 trial in Brașov and the imprisonment term in the Tîrgu-Jiu camp. As we have seen in chapter 1, the Brașov trial was a real event in which Ceaușescu's role was further exaggerated by the Romanian propaganda through the elimination of the other protagonists of the trial.¹¹⁰ What was 'saved' from this episode were Ceaușescu's brave opposition to and criticism of the bourgeois regime and its judiciary system. The paintings that approached this topic attempted to illustrate mainly that Ceaușescu had been both the exponent and the mouthpiece of the working class, a leader totally aware of the defectiveness of the bourgeois regime and of the need for change. Stylistically they resembled photomontages by copying or incorporating photo-documents, a technique that aimed at underlining the truthfulness of the event represented and which ended up by historicising those paintings. Furthermore, Ceaușescu's figure gained in those paintings an iconic aura both by the place it occupied within the composition and by the implied ideas: suffering, devotion to a just cause and an inspiring *exemplum*.

in London in 1907 where Stalin basically took no part in the official proceedings., Nigel Moore, 'The Myth of Stalin: The Psychodynamics of its Utopian Ideals', *Russian History*, Vol. 11, Nos. 2-3, Summer-Fall 1984, 287-288.

¹¹⁰ For this issue see chapter 1, 40.

Eftimie Modâlcă is one of the painters who approached this sub-theme of Ceaușescu's iconography precisely in this manner. He employed different photographs of the young Ceaușescu by incorporating them in paintings that dealt with Ceaușescu's trials and prison terms and by juxtaposing them in order to form a big photo-document image. For instance, the painting that deals with the 1936 Brașov trial uses an image of Ceaușescu-the teenager underground fighter, an image that was excessively used by the Romanian propaganda in order to stress once and again Ceaușescu's credentials as a young communist revolutionary¹¹¹ (Figure 9). Furthermore, Modâlcă makes use of two photographs of the magistrates' courts in Brașov, where the trial took place. The photography of the young Ceaușescu reigns tutelary over the two snapshots and together with the 'inscription' of the town's name (Brașov) and the year of the trial (1936) within the painting leads to the historicisation of the painting, to conferring it an air of 'authenticated past'. Moreover, the crowds depicted in the painting and their particular relationship with Ceaușescu's portrait underline both Ceaușescu's belonging to the working class (many of the men(!) represented wear caps) and the people's recognition of him as a leader as well as their support for his actions.

In the painting devoted to Ceaușescu's period of detention in the anticommunist camp in Tîrgu-Jiu, Modâlcă utilises the same mixed technique of painting and photomontage.¹¹² Two photographs are the focal point of this painting, incorporated in a neutrally painted surface. The one situated in the lower part of the painting allegedly¹¹³ represents Ceaușescu in the Tîrgu-Jiu camp whilst he performs brute labour along with other inmates. The other one is a photograph taken during the electoral campaign in 1946 and was again one of the most circulated images during the eighties.¹¹⁴ Whilst both photographs represent Ceaușescu before he came to

¹¹¹ Eftimie Modâlcă, *File de istorie* (Pages of History), 1986, Arta 6/1986.

¹¹² Eftimie Modâlcă, *File de istorie* (Pages of History), 1989, Arta 5/1989. Image not available.

¹¹³ The photograph is considered a forgery.

¹¹⁴ The image appeared, for instance, under the title 'Comrade Nicolae Ceaușescu in the middle of the electorate (November 1946)' in the volume *Sub flamuri de august, Album omagial de artă*

power, they are nevertheless taken in two very different moments: ante and post war, during the bourgeois and the emerging communist regimes. Through the use of these specific photographs, the artist seems to have sought to acknowledge the worthiness of sacrifice and people's confidence (vote) in such a hard-trying leader.

A last moment illustrated by artists as part of the theme discussed here was that of the August 1944 demonstration in Bucharest when, presumably, the communist leaders led by Comrade Nicolae Ceaușescu galvanised the masses to fight against the last fascist elements in the country. Romanian propaganda provided again raw material for this sub-theme: doctored photographs (most probably again) were used as inspiration for the elaboration of this sub-theme. Corneliu Ionescu almost entirely copied a photograph that purportedly showed the Ceaușescus as leading figures in the demonstration and which was widely circulated in newspapers and homage volumes¹¹⁵ (Figure 10). Although at a first glance the similarities between the photograph and Ionescu's work¹¹⁶ (PLATE 31) seem total, a closer comparative look at the two images gives room to small but significant differences. First of all, in Ionescu's painting, Ceaușescu occupies a central position, he is obviously the person who delivers the speech whilst in the photograph an older, bald person (Gheorghiu-Dej?) does the talking. Furthermore, strangely enough, Elena Ceaușescu is represented in the painting not as she appears in the photograph (long hair, white dress, short sleeves) but rather as she appears in what we dubbed as her standard image as a young communist underground fighter (Figure 8). In addition, she holds a book in her hand as if the artists could no longer escape the scheme of Elena Ceaușescu-the Scientist even in the scenes that had no relation to that topic. A couple of details change the accent in the painting. At least two men in the painting

plastică dedicat aniversării a 45 de ani de la Revoluția de Eliberare Socială și Națională, Antifascistă și Antiimperialistă de la 23 August 1944 (București: Meridiane, 1989).

¹¹⁵ The photograph was published in the volume cited above (see the previous note) under the title: 'Comrade Nicolae Ceaușescu and Comrade Elena Ceaușescu at the meeting in Piața Universității at the end of August 1944, addressing the masses the electrifying call "Everything for Front, Everything for Victory!"'.

¹¹⁶ Corneliu Ionescu, *Tovarășul Nicolae Ceaușescu și tovarășa Elena Ceaușescu la mîringul din 28 august 1944* (Comrade Nicolae Ceaușescu and Comrade Elena Ceaușescu participated in the meeting on August 28, 1944), 1987.

wear caps whilst in the photograph there is one man who wears a hat. It seems that the painter attempted to emphasise the class factor here, to stress the fact that the main opponents of fascism were the workers led by their brave communist leaders. Furthermore, in the painting, Ionescu added the national flag of Romania to the communist one that was visible in the photograph, detail that aimed at underlining the deep patriotic spirit of the Romanian communists, their total devotion to the national cause.

The visual model for this representation might be found in the 'balcony scene' of 1968. On August 22, 1968, Ceaușescu publicly denounced the invasion of Czechoslovakia by the armies of the Warsaw Pact states within a big meeting in the Republic Square in Bucharest. His vehement anti-Soviet stance brought him a genuine and large support of the population at large and, especially, an immediate positive response on the part of the intellectuals.¹¹⁷ The reaction of the artists was equally wholehearted. The most prominent figures of the artistic community expressed in bombastic phrases their entire adherence to the independent position of the party¹¹⁸ and promised to support it through their work.¹¹⁹ Others evaluated the moment as one which opened the gate for the search of new meaning in art, as an enriching and inspiring experience.¹²⁰ The episode also had more direct consequences. Although it appears that no work of art devoted to this specific moment was ever finalised, it seems that it influenced at least one sculptor who devoted to it a bas-relief. Dumitru Popescu, chief of propaganda during Ceaușescu regime, recalls how the sculptor Oscar Han approached him one or two years after

¹¹⁷ For the impact of Ceaușescu's speech within the intellectuals see Dan Berindei, 'Memorii sincere sau dreapta măsură în judecata trecutului' (9), *Dosarele istoriei*, No. 5 (57), 2001, 61 and Lucian Pintilie, *Bricabrac* (Bucharest: Humanitas, 2003), 74.

¹¹⁸ 'I do express my total adherence [to the party's position] and I take sides with those who made a monolith wall around the party at the hearing of the speech delivered by Comrade Nicolae Ceaușescu during the huge popular meeting...', Ion Bitzan, 'Înțelepciunea politicii partidului', *Contemporanul*, August 30, 1968.

¹¹⁹ '...I shall work and make all the necessary efforts to support devotedly the politics of our party, the independence and sovereignty of our socialist motherland, Ibid.

¹²⁰ 'In art, we often live moments that suddenly open the way towards new artistic truths – moments in which we discover profound meaning and significance – which give us a feeling of inner enrichment. At this end of August, we are all living [...] such a moment ...', Ion Sălișteanu, 'Participare', *Contemporanul*, August 30, 1968.

the event and showed him a bas-relief representing the balcony of the Central Committee from which Ceaușescu had delivered his speech in 1968. Han commented:

I worked the bas-relief in the manner of the scene of 1848. You were a kind of modern '48ers, you fought with the new Russia. The tsarist Russia had crushed us and dictated its will. The Bolshevik Russia could not [crush us] in 1968. I want to complete the bas-relief and put it in a public square.¹²¹

A public monument devoted to 1968 was never erected as open anti-Soviet statements were not to be heard again. Nevertheless, the 'balcony scene' was 'saved' into numberless homage volumes that reproduced photographs of Ceaușescu while giving a speech and in the theme of the 1944 demonstration.

5.3. *Work Visits*

One of the most complex and well represented themes in Ceaușescu's iconography was that of the 'work visits'.¹²² It was also a very accurate indicator of the evolution of Ceaușescu's public image for it extensively relied on reality by closely following the alterations that took place over time. Like the theme of the official portrait, that of 'work visits' appeared in the middle of the seventies. However, their evolution over time should be seen as complementary, as they described a different Ceaușescu at one and the same time. Whilst the theme of the official portrait was from the very beginning clearly crystallised and rendered the leader in an imposing, remote and sometimes patronising posture, the theme of the 'work visits' attempted at first to present Ceaușescu as a down-to-earth, close-to-the-people kind of leader. Nevertheless, both themes evolved in the eighties in different directions but maintained a discreet equilibrium. As we have seen in the previous pages of this chapter, the theme of the official portrait evolved towards a schizophrenic imagery

¹²¹ Dumitru Popescu, *Elefanții de porțelan. Scene și personaje în umbra Cortinei de Fier, Memorii transfigurate* (Bucharest: MATCH, n.y.), 51.

¹²² Cristina Petrescu, 'Vizitele de lucru, un ritual al 'Epocii de Aur'', in *Miturile comunismului românesc* (Bucharest: Nemira, 1998).

of the leader that resulted in awkward representations of a solitary Ceaușescu unable to relate any more to the persons around. By contrast, the theme of the work visits evolved towards amplification and an increase in the number of persons depicted within the same image. Ceaușescu started being represented in the midst of people who would follow and listen to him unconditionally, the whole scene being a mock-dialogue rather than a free 'exchange of opinions'. Although these representations aimed at presenting the leader in connection with the led, the general sensation that these late 'work visits' gave was again one of isolation as the various persons depicted in the scenes stood there only as an audience for the main personage(s) represented.

The 'work visits' were a common practice from the very beginning of Ceaușescu's rule. They remained a constant mark of Ceaușescu's activity, even though they altered in their basic characteristics over time. Ceaușescu's main concern in the first years of his rule was to achieve personal and system legitimisation. He endeavoured to shape his image both as a powerful statesman and a popular leader ready to hear the 'voice' of ordinary people. In point of fact, the work visits practice began as an activity of self-presentation and of getting accustomed to the country's realities. He accentuated the need for collaboration between the party and the people and constructed an almost family-like image around the practice that was supposed to become the focus of these 'work visits': the 'exchange of opinions'.¹²³ He wanted to portray himself as a leader open to dialogue, who was consulting with his people every time when he took a decision and who paid attention to their suggestions and requests. Ceaușescu undertook an enormous number of visits in the country and his attitude altered in time from the posture of a docile listener to that of a competent adviser and, finally, to that of a pushing, demanding and omniscient leader without whose word and impulse it was impossible to accomplish anything. In addition,

¹²³ On the occasion of his first work visit paid to Gheorghe Doja CAP (agricultural co-operative farm), Ceaușescu mentioned: 'As you well know, the Romanian people has an ancient custom: a man, before he starts a journey, advises with his family or with his friends which road he should follow [...] This is why, our Party considers that it is good, before embarking on our way, to discuss with workers, peasants, intellectuals [...] with the entire people, to choose the best road in order to achieve the goals that we put forward for ourselves.' (*Scînteia*, June 27, 1965), in Cristina Petrescu, *op. cit.*, 229

there was a fluctuation in the frequency and duration of these work visits. They were extremely frequent in the first years (more precisely in the years 1965-1968), lasting from three to five days. At that time they were also collective visits and were reported as such in the official newspaper of the party, *Scînteia*.¹²⁴

The turning point was again August 1968 and the Czechoslovak crisis.¹²⁵ Not only did the accounts in the written mass media change, the focus becoming now openly Ceaușescu's figure, but Ceaușescu's attitude itself altered. Visibly more secure, he became the serious constructor of communism whose role was that of being present in every corner of the country and of supporting through his word and knowledge each enterprise. Both the name and the purpose of these visits and the leader's concrete contributions were precisely redefined. 'Visits' became 'work visits'¹²⁶ and Ceaușescu's commentaries, 'directives'. During the classic period of the work visits, namely the seventies,¹²⁷ Ceaușescu became a kind of oracle whose 'precious directives'¹²⁸ had to be faithfully followed. This is the period when Ceaușescu's figure achieved the features of a multi-competent person, the first source of information in the fields of agriculture, constructions, mining, etc. He transformed himself into the first agriculturist, first constructor and first miner of the country. During this period, 'work visits' became much shorter (only one day at most), but

¹²⁴ The standard formulation was 'the visit of the leaders of the State and the Party in...'. It is interesting to note that the shift from a collective leadership to an individual one took first visual form in newspapers. The visual backup that accompanied the articles devoted to the work visits evolved from photos that presented almost all the leaders of the Party to images that gradually focused only on Ceaușescu, although the photos' captions remained the same.

¹²⁵ The period that followed immediately after August 1968 was marked by an unprecedented number of visits, undertaken by all the members of the Romanian leadership and had as main purpose the reinforcement of the bond between the leaders and the people in a moment when the country's independence was under threat. What can be noticed was an accent on Ceaușescu's figure in newspapers. For instance, no later than August 31, the visit that the leadership undertook to Cluj is mentioned as 'The visit of Comrade Nicolae Ceaușescu and of other leaders of the Party and State to the county of Cluj'. (*Scînteia*, August 1968)

¹²⁶ The term appeared for the first time in *Scînteia*, January 10, 1969., Cristina Petrescu, *op. cit.*, Note 10, 233.

¹²⁷ The increase in the number of Ceaușescu's work visits in the country in the second half of the seventies and the beginning of the eighties was determined by the decrease in the number of the visits abroad.

¹²⁸ The epithet 'precious' was added later in the eighties in order to stress the high quality of the directives given.

instead encompassed more units.¹²⁹ That led to the myth of Ceaușescu's efficiency and ubiquity and to his image as a leader whose advice was essential for the well-being of the nation. The mere number of visits became an important issue, a sort of record breaking activity or Guinness Book competition, as statistic data on years, regions and types of units visited were published in almost every reverential volume that appeared from the beginning of the seventies on. A well-known phrase circulated in Romania at that time said: 'He has no working desk, his working desk is the country's map.' Ceaușescu's constant wakefulness became an ingredient of his cult.¹³⁰ In the eighties, a permanent page was inaugurated in *Flacăra* in which the work visits paid by Ceaușescu were described on a regular basis. The page bore the big title '*Patria, cabinetul de lucru al președintelui*' (Motherland, the Office of our President).

All these visits were by no means simple visits. They were accompanied by a welcome ritual that gradually augmented and altered itself into a real cult of fervent veneration.¹³¹ Over time, this ritual became the focus of the visits and encompassed veritable performances that always accompanied the visits of the 'high guests'. At any rate, the practice of work visits and the veneration that was required on the occasion of these events helped a lot the configuration of Ceaușescu's cult. One can say that these manifestations were nothing less than a general rehearsal for the shows of worship that annually took place on the occasion of Ceaușescu's birthday celebration. Moreover, the work visits were gradually presented in other media too. The practice of showing in detail the whole of a visit was first encountered in the 'actuality news' screened in cinemas at the beginning of those movies that people

¹²⁹ This resembles the technique Hitler used in his second presidential campaign when thanks to an aeroplane he was able to address more campaign rallies per day. The slogan accompanying his electoral tour – 'the Führer over Germany' – captured the same idea of ubiquity. See for this Ian Kershaw, *The 'Hitler Myth', Image and Reality in the Third Reich* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1989), 41.

¹³⁰ As mentioned earlier during this chapter Ceaușescu was not represented at his desk, peacefully working on a speech or studying a document. Unlike Stalin who was depicted in his office, Ceaușescu preferred the image of an active leader, image much closer to that promoted by Khrushchev, who was as well a work visits addict. The only images of Ceaușescu sitting or working at his desk are photographs published in homage volumes.

¹³¹ For the forms taken by this ritual over time and for the differences that appeared as a result of competition between different organisers of the work visits see Cristina Petrescu, *op. cit.*, 230-232.

were interested to watch. From the end of the sixties on, these 'short movies' presented the visits from 'the departure from the railway station or the airport [...] to the "enthusiastic" welcoming with orchestras, *buciume*,¹³² pioneers and flowers, carpets unfolded on the streets, peasants dressed up in their feast outfits, all of them happy and smiling, *hore*,¹³³ songs and kisses, then "*Perinița*"¹³⁴ in which the entire delegation took part, Ceaușescu included, bread and salt, gifts, meals taken in the peasants' houses ...'¹³⁵ In the eighties, these kind of presentations became regular practice on television, ending in the final years by confiscating an important amount of time from the daily two-hour program.

The theme of the work visits was one of the earliest represented. It responded to the need of depicting Ceaușescu as an active leader, in touch with his people. It followed closely the alterations that occurred in the evolution of the work visits' ritual and the visual representations devoted to this theme attempted to cover almost every aspect of the real phenomenon. The vast theme of work visits could be divided into three sub-groups. The first one depicts Ceaușescu during the welcoming moments when he was received and greeted by people. The second one represents Ceaușescu assessing the situation and advising people on what they have to do, giving 'instructions' that would prove essential for the improvement of each specific situation. The third one portrays the post-directive moment, the checking of how his directives were implemented and an overall assessment of the results obtained. This division of the theme respects the internal tempo of the theme itself and also the evolution of the real attitude of Ceaușescu during these work visits. The most spectacular changes can be seen in the first group of images, because the 'work visits' gradually became a means of praising Ceaușescu, of showing people's adulation for him and of portraying him as a sort of oracle whose right words were essential for the fulfilment of whatever task. The second group of images is the most

¹³² Traditional Romanian instrument.

¹³³ Traditional Romanian dance.

¹³⁴ Traditional Romanian dance.

¹³⁵ Item No. 1112/67, 'Cartoons, Short Films and Newsreels in Rumania', May 29, 1967, Open Society Archives, *fond* 300-60-1, Box 437.

numerous. It also had a spectacular evolution and diversification.¹³⁶ The last one crystallised relatively late, in the eighties, and it was the group that – along with some official portraits - reintroduced the issue of time by reinforcing the image of Ceaușescu as the founder of new communist Romania.

Within the first group - the meeting or the welcome moment – we shall focus on two images that best illustrate the evolution of this theme. They were produced within a relatively long span of time (1974 and 1983) and were representative for the changes that occurred in the welcoming ritual. The first one, produced in 1974, represents the meeting between Ceaușescu and the people in an extremely quiet manner¹³⁷ (Figure 8). It seems to portray a friendly encounter between two equals. The focus of this painting is not Ceaușescu himself, but him *and* the man with whom he shakes hands. The two men are represented in the same plane, there are no differences in size in their depiction, only more light on Ceaușescu's face (but there is the same light on the faces of the two vaguely represented people behind). The posture of the two men stresses the warm relationship that exists between the leader and the people. The two unfinished persons depicted to the right of the image convey the idea of a crowd, of people welcoming Ceaușescu. This metonymy is an interesting device used by Brudașcu in order to introduce the idea of a venerating public whilst depicting the un-patronising relationship between Ceaușescu and the man in the foreground. In a sense the image is completely fractured. It attempts to render two different ideas: Ceaușescu, the approachable, friendly leader and Ceaușescu the leader adulated by masses. Nevertheless, the first one is still the focus of this image. The visual scheme described above was not used further, as there were always two unequal partners to be represented: Ceaușescu and the people.

There is a totally different situation in the second image within this group¹³⁸ (Figure 12). Ceaușescu and his wife are represented in a car whilst they greet the people

¹³⁶ Over time, in *Arta* review, there were published sixteen images on the theme of work visits. Twelve paintings out of sixteen fall in the second category.

¹³⁷ Corneliu Brudașcu, *Vizită de lucru* (Work Visit), 1974, *Arta* 2-3/1976.

¹³⁸ Ion Bitzan, Vladimir Șetran, *Salutul* (The Greeting), 1983, *Arta* 3/1983;

who acclaim them on the sides of the road. Both of them are remote and showy, their remoteness being accentuated by the heavy structure of their car that functions as a sort of barrier between the presidential couple and the people. In this painting, Ceaușescu wears the established work visit 'equipment', the pocketed suit and the cap. The cap will become a recurrent element in most of the representations of this theme (and not only this one). It is an interesting element that inevitably makes us think of possible similarities with Lenin's most commonly identifying visual attribute. In the case of Lenin, the cap was employed as an indicator of his revolutionary past, 'Lenin the Bolshevik, the man of exile and clandestine struggle, the fighter in the October Revolution, and the internationalist leader'.¹³⁹ As we have seen earlier in this chapter, the cap was not used at all in Ceaușescu's representations as a revolutionary; only people around him worn it in order to underline their belonging to the working class. Therefore, its significance in the work visit theme should be different. It was probably perceived as denoting an informal attitude, openness towards the interlocutors, and closeness and identification with those with whom Ceaușescu engaged in dialogue.¹⁴⁰ Furthermore, the cap in Ceaușescu's case became a token of his activeness, of his outside activity as opposed to the desk work.

The welcome ritual became more and more sophisticated over time. Ancient local customs of greeting the guests - such as their presentation with bread and salt - or customs taken over from his Asian tours - such as throwing rose petals in front of the visitors - were mixed together in order to transform the welcome moment into an outstanding one. Sometimes, the Ceaușescus were forced to become active parties in the welcome rituals and to get involved in such performances as traditional

¹³⁹ cf. François-Xavier Coquin, 'L'image de Lénine dans l'iconographie révolutionnaire et post-révolutionnaire', *Annales ESC* 2 (March-April 1989), cited in Victoria E. Bonnell, *Iconography of Power, Soviet Political Posters under Lenin and Stalin* (Berkeley, Los Angeles, London: University of California Press, 1997), 143.

¹⁴⁰ Victoria Bonnell maintains that the cap was a common element of the proletarian attire in France and England since the 1890s and not uncommon at all among the other communist leaders (for instance Nikolai Bukharin wore a similar cap). Therefore, the cap should be regarded rather as a token of class belonging, an element that functioned as a password for those who shared common creeds.

Romanian dances. A photograph representing such a moment was used by Ion Bitzan to depict this slightly awkward ritual. The personages depicted are exactly the same as the ones we can see in the published image; the costumes' details of the children as well as the outfits of the presidential couple are accurately copied in the painting¹⁴¹ (PLATE 32). Even such small details as the red carnation in Elena Ceaușescu's hand or the Star of the Republic on Nicolae Ceaușescu's suit are reproduced in the painting.

The photographic fidelity with which Bitzan realised these two paintings is not something awkward in the context of his work. Bitzan was without doubt the most interesting and talented artist who consented to produce works devoted to Ceaușescu. Secretary of the Graphic Art Section within the Artists' Union for years, Bitzan developed one of the most coherent and complex object-art in Romania while he produced rather atypical portraits of Ceaușescu. He started at the end of the sixties to experiment with collage and the incorporation into the surface of the painting of different materials (wax, leather, wood, metal, etc) or of small objects with sentimental value (photographs, for instance). Shortly after that he moved to the fabrication of objects (bags, 'boxes with memories', books) on which he often intervened with texts and personal signs. The recurrent ideas that his series of objects tried to emphasise were that of content, of substance, of recuperated past histories, of testimony.¹⁴² In the paintings representing Ceaușescu, Bitzan took over elements from his 'parallel' work: his obsession with photography was probably at the origin of his choice of using photographs published in journals as a source of inspiration for Ceaușescu's portraits; the way he differently treated the surface of the painting, giving different texture to the objects and figures represented; finally,

¹⁴¹ Ion Bitzan. *În mijlocul copiilor* (Among children), 1986. The title is misleading and would suggest that this painting belongs to a different category – Ceaușescu and the children. In the eighties, themes ceased to be pure representations of a single theme and their poly-vocalism was achieved through the combination of two or more themes or through the employment of titles that enlarged usually the meaning of the episode depicted. Furthermore, during the last years, the same painting appeared in the journals under different titles that sometimes had little to do with the image itself whilst the whole procedure gave the sensation of productivity and allowed the employment of the same image within differently thematic exhibitions.

¹⁴² Alexandra Titu, *Experimetul în arta românească după 1960* (Bucharest: Meridiane, 2003), 96-97.

the way he incorporated photographs of the Ceaușescus in his works devoted to the presidential couple.

The second sub-group, the largest one, has a remarkable coherence. No matter what the location was, no matter who the people around Ceaușescu were, he was always the centre of the image depicted in a posture that individualised him even more. If we could cut out Ceaușescu's figure from these representations and place them one on the top of the other we would be amazed to see that the repertoire of Ceaușescu's gestures within this series is very limited. The stereotypical portrayal of his gestures (arms raised, pointing towards something, body slightly bent testing the quality of a product, etc) accounts for the desire to establish a well-defined image of Ceaușescu as a competent leader, who could give excellent advice on no matter what issue. Consequently, he was always represented in a very active posture, showing, indicating, being the one who best knew what was needed in every particular situation. As in the case of the previous sub-group, the construction of Ceaușescu's image as an active, omniscient leader was heavily based on the way this facet of his public image was presented in mass-media. The newsreels devoted to this aspect, the enormous amount of photographs of Ceaușescu taken during work visits and published in *Scînteia* on a daily basis offered an immeasurable source of inspiration for the artists who focused on the depiction of this theme.

The themes depicted within this series are only a few and they basically illustrate Ceaușescu's main points of interest, those he constantly pursued during his rule. He was fascinated with big industrial plans that would have transformed the country's face and left a perennial imprint upon it.¹⁴³ He also aimed at transforming the capital into a modern city and at establishing a centre of power suitable for the new type of power he stood for. Furthermore he was obsessed with record breaking agricultural results and, as a person of peasant origin, he felt even more entitled to give advice

¹⁴³ This kind of propensity towards huge projects that would reshape the human environment was a common feature of the communist regimes. Channel systems, highways, huge irrigations dams were constructed in the Soviet Union in order to prove the Promethean (new) man's power to transform the world around him. See for this Lars Erik Blomqvist, 'Some Utopian Elements in Stalinist Art', *Russian History*, Vol. 11, Nos. 2-3, Summer-Fall 1984.

and to play the expert.¹⁴⁴ Finally, he paid particular attention to his relationship with the miners who were considered as having an essential part in the upholding of the national economy. Especially after the miners' strike in 1977 and Ceaușescu's being forced to concede financial advantages and special living and working conditions to this category, he became even more attentive in preserving an amiable relationship with the miners.

One of Ceaușescu's dearest projects of modernising the country was the construction of the Danube-Black Sea Channel. The project was supposed to connect the Danube directly to the Black Sea avoiding the Danube Delta and, consequently, to increase the traffic on the river. The work to this project had begun at the end of the forties and the channel became shortly notorious as a forced work place for political prisoners. The project was abandoned immediately after Stalin's death as a sign of Gheorghiu-Dej regime's distancing from the practices of hard Stalinism. Retaken by Ceaușescu at the beginning of the 1970s, the project was considered one of the emblematic achievements of the regime. It was praised in verses, songs and paintings; it was given extended space in journals and newsreels; Ceaușescu was often shown while he was visiting the channel. As the retaking of the project was Ceaușescu's personal initiative, he was usually depicted in very active postures, giving instructions,¹⁴⁵ (PLATE 33) gesticulating whilst the people around listened to him carefully and took notes¹⁴⁶ (PLATE 34). This last painting is in fact very telling for the usual inventory of a classical work visit. There was always a crowd that stood obediently around Ceaușescu. Among these people there was at least one person who wrote down every single word of Ceaușescu, a scribe whose job was to 'collect' Ceaușescu's precious directives and to assure him that they would be implemented down to the smallest detail. When Ceaușescu was not the geometrical centre of the image, painters employed other visual devices to

¹⁴⁴ He was also Minister of Agriculture before 1965.

¹⁴⁵ Constantin Nițescu, *Tovarășul Nicolae Ceaușescu între constructorii șantierului Canalul Dunăre-Marea Neagră* (Comrade Nicolae Ceaușescu among the Constructors of the Danube-Black Sea Channel), 1978.

¹⁴⁶ Doru Rotaru, *Tovarășul Nicolae Ceaușescu în vizită de lucru la canalul Dunăre-Marea Neagră* (Comrade Nicolae Ceaușescu in a work visit to the Danube-Black Sea Channel), 1985.

individualise him. He was represented slightly in front of the other persons whilst most of the people around looked directly towards him and listened to him attentively. In Rotaru's work, Ceaușescu himself confidently stares into the eyes of the viewer whilst he seems totally immersed in giving directives. The painting has something of an instantaneous snapshot although Ceaușescu's attitude is obviously very showy.

An even more interesting work is the one realised by Vasile Pop Negreșteanu¹⁴⁷ (PLATE 35). The scene is pretty much similar to that depicted by Rotaru in the sense that Ceaușescu is the central character around whom the whole image is organised. Close to him and well individualised are his wife, Elena Ceaușescu, and his youngest son, Nicu Ceaușescu (holding a red notebook - a party document? - in his hand). The channel is more visible in this painting and Ceaușescu's gesture is more one of pointing towards the channel than giving advice. The novelty of this painting is nevertheless the figure depicted in the foreground, at the left of the image, who is totally alien from the rest of the picture. He is not the person who usually takes notes, he does not wear a casket; he does not use a notebook but rather a scroll or a sketching board and he is represented in an effacing, colourless manner. The identity of this character is ambiguous. There are two ways in which his presence could be explained in the painting. Firstly, the figure represented in the foreground could be a chronicler or a historian who writes down, narrates the big achievements of the Golden Age. This interpretation would correspond entirely to Ceaușescu's desire to single out his rule as an exceptional one and to leave written testimonies for future generations about the magnificence of his epoch.¹⁴⁸ Therefore, the figure in the foreground could be a chronicler who simply registers what he sees, who records for the generations to come a work visit paid by the Ceaușescus. Ceaușescu's gesture, one that echoes the *voievozi*'s gestures in their votive portraits in the mediaeval churches, is a gesture of showing *his* foundation, of underlining the

¹⁴⁷ Vasile Pop Negreșteanu, *Vizita tovarășului Nicolae Ceaușescu la canalul Dunăre-Marea Neagră* (The Visit of Comrade Nicolae Ceaușescu to the Danube-Black Sea Channel), 1987.

¹⁴⁸ See for this chapter I where the ritual of burying scrolls in the foundations of the buildings erected during Ceaușescu Era is described in detail.

importance and endurance of his project. Additionally, the white dove flying over the channel is employed here with one of its old Orthodox significances, namely as a token of transcending time or as a symbol of guaranteeing a pact, in this case between Ceaușescu and the future. These two elements transform the painting into a presentation of Ceaușescu's foundation that aims at transcending time and preserving the moment intact for future generations.

Secondly, the figure in the foreground could be the painter himself. In an interview taken a year after the painting was realised, Negreșteanu confessed the powerful impact that the visit of the channel on the occasion of its inauguration had upon him. He was one of the many artists present at the inauguration festivity who produced afterwards works dedicated to the special atmosphere of the moment. The passage describing this special atmosphere goes like this:

I was near them at the festive inaugural moment of the Danube-Black Sea Channel. The light of that day remained forever in my memory, that extraordinary atmosphere when Comrade Nicolae Ceaușescu addressed [to the workers] warm congratulations for everything that they had achieved, for the exemplary way in which they had spread across Dobrogea a huge blue ribbon, the Channel, the Blue Channel. These kind of moments are almost unique in an artist life and I could not, of course, let them only pass before my eyes. I tried to *immortalise* [our italics] them...¹⁴⁹

The relevance of Negreșteanu's testimony consists in the accent he put on the immortalisation of the moment. He seemed to have been perfectly aware of the fact that his painting should not have been a simple depiction of the event he had witnessed but its immortalisation, concretised in a piece whose message would endure over time.

¹⁴⁹ Interview with Vasile Pop Negreșteanu, 'Noi trebuie să fim cu totul ai timpului nostru', *Flacăra*, January 29, 1988, 15.

Other important projects depicted by artists were those that aimed at the alteration of the capital in a 'modern socialist town'. The works to transform the river Dîmbovița¹⁵⁰ into a salubrious and modern draining channel for Bucharest and those devoted to the re-organisation of the old centre of the city¹⁵¹ were the two main enterprises on which propaganda and artists, respectively, focused. Again, the photographs published in journals served as sources for these paintings. The image of Ceaușescu as the utmost constructor of Bucharest was widely promoted in the journals during the eighties. His frequent visits to the various construction sites scattered across Bucharest were reported in the press to a large extent and images of Ceaușescu in different poses (examining a plan, giving instructions, pointing to an area that was to be re-organised, etc) were generously exposed in journals. More often than not, this image was transposed into the medium of painting in a very accurate way, rendering the smallest details that these images encompassed. As mentioned before, this practice of copying images published in journals was employed by artists from the very beginning, but it gained weight especially in the eighties when Ceaușescu gradually became an estranged leader whose presence was primarily maintained in the public eye through the hyper-exposure of published images. Furthermore, within the work visit theme the practice of using photographs published in journals was even more widespread as the feeling of authenticity and real life representation was sought. Therefore, it is not surprising that some paintings seem simply copied from images published in journals. This is the case with a painting by Valentin Tănase that represents a work visit paid by the presidential couple on the systematisation site of Dîmbovița river¹⁵² (PLATE 36). It follows closely an image published in a homage volume in 1988 that was devoted to the transformations that the capital went through during 'the Golden Age'.¹⁵³ Although the posture of Ceaușescu is slightly different in the two images (in the

¹⁵⁰ Dîmbovița is the river that crosses Bucharest and was completely re-arranged during Ceaușescu's rule.

¹⁵¹ The reconstruction of the old centre of Bucharest was the major project of Ceaușescu in the capital. For more details on this see chapter 1, 62-63

¹⁵² Valentin Tănase, *Vizită de lucru pe șantierul de amenajare a râului Dîmbovița* (Work Visit to the Working Site for the Renovation of Dîmbovița River), 1985.

¹⁵³ *București, Omagiu marelui erou* (București: Meridiane, 1988).

photograph there is a clear instruction-giving attitude echoed by the man who feverishly writes down the leader's words whereas in the painting Ceaușescu points towards an already finished enterprise) his outfits are copied down to the smallest detail (even his shoes are truthfully reproduced in the painting).

The reconstruction of the Civic Centre was in fact the main project to which Ceaușescu was devoted in the eighties. Paintings on this subject represented him in front of plans and models explaining how the new Civic Centre should look like¹⁵⁴ (Figure 9). As the construction advanced, painters represented Ceaușescu on the construction site itself talking to builders and observing the evolution of the project¹⁵⁵ (PLATE 37). The encounter between the presidential couple (Elena Ceaușescu accompanies him; she stands right behind him holding a flower in her hand) and the workers is depicted against the backdrop of the erecting construction and countless cranes that offer an ample view of the stage and size of the construction.

Another group of images in this theme deals with the portrayal of Ceaușescu as the first expert in agriculture. The paintings are again very stereotyped; they respect the well established scheme of a work visit only that, this time, the location and the spectators of Ceaușescu's performance are different. Eugen Palade is one of the many painters who approached this sub-theme. His representations of Ceaușescu as the first expert in agriculture are very eloquent in the sense that they depict him as the only provider of directives, the one who supervises, plans, corrects. In the work entitled *Primăvara* (Spring), Ceaușescu is represented in the characteristic posture of showing what should be done¹⁵⁶ (PLATE 38). He points to the areas that are to be cultivated whilst his wife seems to approve him with a mild smile.¹⁵⁷ The leaders'

¹⁵⁴ Ion Bitzan, Vladimir Șetran, *Vizită de lucru* (Work Visit), 1984, published in *Arta* 5/1989.

¹⁵⁵ Vasile Pop Negreșteanu, *Vizită de lucru, Noul Centru Civic, București* (Work Visit, The New Civic Centre, Bucharest), 1986.

¹⁵⁶ Eugen Palade, *Primăvara* (Spring), 1983, *Arta* 1/1984.

¹⁵⁷ This type of image was a frequent one in the construction of the communist leader's iconography. Photographs showing Khrushchev or Kim Il Sung during work visits became common. See for a photograph representing Kim Il Sung while he gives instructions Takagi Takeo, *Kim Il Sung. Master of Leadership* (Pyongyang: Foreign Languages Publishing House, 1976). The photo represents Kim

faces express serenity and satisfaction as if they were able to see how the fields full of cereals would look like once Ceaușescu's directives were put into practice. In contrast, the faces of the people around the two leaders are indistinguishable and their attitudes indicate obedience but also a sort of boredom and saturation. Their bodies seem reposing, their hands are folded in an expecting position, their eyes stare in the ground. Was this a subtle device employed by the artist to allude to a situation that became too obvious, too extreme or was it considered simply unnecessary, a waste of time, to focus on other figures as long as the main protagonists were depicted as they presumably wished? It is difficult to give a clear cut answer to this question but our assumption is that the truth lies somewhere in between. As we have seen in the section devoted to the official portrait in this chapter, artists were sensitive and - given the Romanian political context - we could say daringly humorous to depict Ceaușescu in obviously unflattering hypostases at the time when the Romanian leader became totally torn from reality. Therefore, it would not be impossible that Palade had painted here a 'real work visit' where people were 'enthusiastic' only when the presidential couple gazed upon them and became passive or self-absorbed as soon as this ended.

The other painting by Palade depicts Ceaușescu even more clearly as the central character of the composition¹⁵⁸ (PLATE 39). His gestures are more vehement, he basically demands his main interlocutor (a person rendered from aback, who diligently takes notes; we can see the upper white corner of a notebook which remains unscreened by his body) to take notes of what he is saying. The other two characters clearly individualised in the painting are Elena Ceaușescu and a little boy who stands in front of her. They are both dressed in bright clothes – Elena Ceaușescu a yellow dress, the boy a white peasant costume – and a light is placed on their figures, light that also encompasses Ceaușescu. The boy's outfit within the picture (there is one more character, a woman in the far right of the image who also

Il Sung in a field of wheat while he addresses the people and gesticulates. The caption of the photo is very telling: 'The respected and beloved leader Comrade Kim Il Sung giving on-the-spot guidance to the Changyon Coop Farm in Changyon county'.

¹⁵⁸ Eugen Palade, *Vizită de lucru* (Work Visit), 1983.

wears a peasant costume) accounts for the degree of authenticity and local colour that the painter wanted to incorporate in his composition. It is true that people in traditional costume were a common and constant element within the welcome scenarios with which the presidential couple was greeting everywhere, but in this picture the little boy is too evidently placed in the centre of the image, right in front of Elena Ceaușescu so as not to suspect that he has more than a decorative role. Perhaps - besides the role indicated above - he stands there as a defining element for Elena Ceaușescu whose maternal attributes are thus reinforced. Furthermore, this contributes to the strengthening of the image of the Ceaușescus as 'the parents of the nation' who care for their people.

Apart from agriculture, the other big fields to which Ceaușescu devoted his attention were those that contributed to the process of industrialisation of the country. Within these fields, mining and miners occupied a distinct place for at least two reasons. First of all they were a constant on Ceaușescu's agenda as they played a pivotal role in the effort of industrialising the country. Secondly, the miners in Valea Jiului were the first professional group to revolt in 1977 against the regime. Their demands for better living and work conditions were rapidly met and the conflict closed without further irradiation, but Ceaușescu remained assured that the miners were a brute force that should not be ignored. That is why he paid innumerable visits in the mining areas and kept always an open ear for their demands. Other branch to which he paid minute attention was the heavy industry. The iconography of this big sub-theme is again very stereotypical. It consists basically in the structure and gestures of a classic work visit scene only that the scenery is changed. Therefore, they will be analysed together, but we will pay attention to the few differences that can be distinguished between the representations devoted to each of the two categories.

First of all, there is a difference as far as the atmosphere in the two categories is concerned. The location chosen in order to represent the work visits in the mining

areas is the subterranean¹⁵⁹ (PLATE 40). The roughness of the landscape, the dim lights, the rocks and the reflections, the density of the air, all tell the story of a rough place, where hardship and danger are the everyday life. Furthermore, people are clearly tough characters, they do not smile, they do not seem to talk much either.¹⁶⁰ In Nițescu's painting, the only character with a mild expression on his face is in fact Ceaușescu. He looks far into the gallery and apparently he sketches some plans for developing the exploitation of the pit. His figure is illuminated at the thought of the final realisation. In contrast, the miners' figures are motionless, tough; they stand all together as a group in the middle of which Ceaușescu individualises himself both through his facial expression and through his outfit. Even more individualised is Ceaușescu in a work by Vasile Pop Negreșteanu.¹⁶¹ As usual, the painter confers a central position to the Romanian leader whilst his outfit is well individualised within the picture. In point of fact, it seems to be copied from a photograph of the presidential couple taken during a work visit in a miner zone and published in the 1983 *Homage* volume.¹⁶² Ceaușescu wears in both images a black outfit, a survival bag caught in belts across his waist and shoulder and a white protection cap. Even the gesture of salute that Ceaușescu makes in the photograph is reproduced in the painting and transformed into an instruction gesture. This time Ceaușescu seems to have an interlocutor and the other miners are more engaged in a sort of relationship with the leader in the sense that they look towards him.

In contrast with the images described above, the paintings devoted to the depiction of the work visits to factories are more vivid. The moment chosen is usually a welcome moment when Ceaușescu shakes hands with the workers whilst at least

¹⁵⁹ Constantin Nițescu, *Tovarășul Nicolae Ceaușescu în vizită de lucru la minerii de pe Valea Jiului* (Comrade Nicolae Ceaușescu during a Work Visit to the Miners on the Jiului Valley), 1980.

¹⁶⁰ Maybe this is a visual device in order to depict the miners as workers able of heroic, record breaking accomplishments. The representation of Ceaușescu among them, dressed like them, guiding them alludes to the real author of these records. See for the cult of heroes as a tool that reinforces the cult of the main hero, Hans Günther, 'The Heroic Myth in Socialist Realism', in Boris Groys and Max Hollein (eds.) *Dream Factory Communism, The Visual Culture of the Stalin Era* (Frankfurt: Hatje Cantz Verlag, 2003).

¹⁶¹ Vasile Pop Negreșteanu, *Vizită de lucru* (Work Visit), 1983. Image not available.

¹⁶² *Omagiu* (Bucharest: Meridiane, 1983)

one person in the group applauds¹⁶³ (PLATE 41). Moreover, Ceaușescu is depicted in these images as a touchable leader, more preoccupied with engaging in a dialogue with the people than simply giving directions.

The third category is formed by pieces that represent the post-directives moment, namely the examination of the results achieved. It ends, in a sense, the circle of a work visit. There are different visual schemes used in order to convey this idea. The most obvious one is the depiction of the moment of inauguration of an important economic project. Panait, for instance, represents the inauguration of the Danube-Black Sea Channel¹⁶⁴ (PLATE 42). Ceaușescu is represented in front of a command board at the moment when he pushes the starting button to fill the channel up. In the background there are depicted the channel and the bridges constructed over it. A different scheme is that of representing 'an inspection moment' like the ones that depict Ceaușescu while he verifies the way the harvests grew. He checks closely the quality of the harvest accompanied by party activists or by simple peasants or he assesses the production whilst party activists wait to hear his comments, ready to take notes on how they should improve the results¹⁶⁵ (PLATE 43).

Another interesting visual scheme employed by Romanian artists in order to render the achievements of the Ceaușescu Epoch was one already established in Stalin's iconography: the serene admiration of the successes attained during the leader's rule.¹⁶⁶ The presidential couple is represented watching the achievements of the Ceaușescu Epoch with admiration and contentment. Ion Bitzan, for instance, depicts

¹⁶³ Virgil Mihăescu, *Vizită de lucru* (Work Visit), 1983.

¹⁶⁴ Ștefan Panait, *Constanța*, 1987, *Arta* 1/1988.

¹⁶⁵ Valentin Tănase, *Vizită de lucru* (Work Visit).

¹⁶⁶ The standard painting representing Stalin in this attitude is Fedor S. Shurpin, 'The Morning of our Native Land'. See for this Matthew Cullerne Bown, *Socialist Realist Painting* (New Haven & London: Yale University Press, 1998), 238. Similar representations can be encountered in the iconographies of other communist leaders. See for instance the painting 'Le camarade Kim Il Sung, grand Leader de la révolution, au bord du lac Tcheundji du mont Baiktou-san', in *Sous la bannière des grandes idées de djoutché du camarade Kim Il Sung, A l'occasion du 60ème anniversaire de la naissance du camarade Kim Il Sung, Grand Leader* (Pyongyang: Editions en Langues Etrangères, 1972).

the Ceaușescu while they watch the new Civic Centre in Bucharest¹⁶⁷ (PLATE 44). The two leaders are represented in a relaxed pose as if they admired a landscape or watched a familiar yet pleasant scene. Probably their image is copied from a photograph as there is no pomposity or artifice in their posture. The recently finished blocks of flats in the newly re-organised area of the Civic Centre are only sketched in the background. The atmosphere of serenity is reinforced by the very bright chromatic that Bitzan uses in his work. Not only do the two leaders wear very bright outfits and the whiteness of the blocks dominates the painting, but the light itself seems to be the dominant colour in the composition.

Although it uses the same compositional scheme, the painting produced by Gheorghe Ioniță gives a totally different impression¹⁶⁸ (PLATE 45). The presidential couple seems effectively thrilled by the cumulated view of the accomplishments that had been realised under their guidance. Their pose denotes satisfaction, joy and pride. They are represented like two statues, perfectly straight and immobile (in spite of Ceaușescu's folded hands which reduce a little from the solemnity of their pose). They look outside the painting, although the object of their admiration is obviously what the viewers can see right behind their backs. This kind of gaze is a tool of 'visualising the progress',¹⁶⁹ of creating a sense of continuity between today and tomorrow or, even more, of equating the present with the future. Furthermore, this kind of gaze in this particular composition may have other purpose too. It aims at rendering the Ceaușescu as *the founders* who would be remembered over centuries due to their remarkable constructing zest and tremendous impact upon the definitive modernisation of the country. They proudly stand in front of a collage of their foundations (The Civic Centre, the Danube-Black Sea Channel, etc) in an evidently authorial pose.

¹⁶⁷ Ion Bitzan, *Modernizarea capitalei* (The Modernisation of the Capital), 1989.

¹⁶⁸ Gheorghe Ioniță, *Anii marilor construcții* (The Years of the Great Constructions).

¹⁶⁹ Wolfgang Holz., 'Allegory and Iconography in Socialist Realist Painting', in Matthew Cullerne Bown and Brandon Taylor (eds.) *Art of the Soviets, Painting, Sculpture and Architecture in an One-Party State, 1917-1992* (Manchester and New York: Manchester University Press, 1993), 74.

The relationship between present and past, history and future memory,¹⁷⁰ Ceaușescu-the-founder and the Romanian leaders of the past is even more clearly illustrated in a piece that follows basically the same compositional structure although it cannot be taken easily as a classical ‘work visit’¹⁷¹ (PLATE 46). Tănase’s work depicts the presidential couple in a forward movement but with their heads turned back towards a resurrected world of historical figures (Burebista, Mihai Viteazul, Alexandru Ioan Cuza, etc). In the left part of the image (in the direction of the Ceaușescus’ advancement) there are represented the main achievements of the Golden Age (metro, factories, new blocks). The relationship that the artist endeavours to establish between Ceaușescu and the great figures of the Romanian past, between Ceaușescu and history becomes evident through the employment of this scheme: Ceaușescu will be remembered by future generations as an equal (or even more) of the great *voievozi* of the Romanian history. The surprise that can be read on the Ceaușescus’ faces is yet another tool used in order to make the ‘insertion’ of the presidential couple into history to look more natural. The resurrected historical figures seem to ‘appear’ there by their own will, called into being by the magnitude of the transformation that the country was undergoing. They voluntarily (admiringly?) came to support the Ceaușescus in their constructing efforts and to establish a link between past, present and future.

5.4. *The Supreme Commander of the Army / The Hero of Peace*

In a classical understanding of the pacifist attitude, the above title is at least confusing, but when it is read within the framework of the totalitarian regimes’ internal ‘logic’, it becomes somehow comprehensible, as the ‘double discourse’ was one of the fundamental constitutive parts in the functioning of those regimes. As a consequence of this inner logic, the co-existence of these two apparently contradictory facets should be regarded as something natural and, even more, as a proof that the cult of Ceaușescu encompassed many different facets that co-existed

¹⁷⁰ See for this notion chapter 1, 34.

¹⁷¹ Valentin Tănase. *Omagiu* (Homage).

in the world of communist myth creation. Especially in the eighties, the image of the 'peace-loving soldier' became emblematic for the construction of Ceaușescu's image underlining once again the conflicting facets of the Romanian leader's cult.

The two themes had different developments, but they began to co-exist in the eighties as complementary sides of the same stated concern for the future and prosperity of Romania and the world. Romanian propaganda was in charge of producing enormous amounts of articles, verses, TV broadcasts and images that would promote the image of Ceaușescu as an internationally celebrated fighter for the peace of the world and a supporter of stability and peaceful co-operation/negotiation between peoples.¹⁷² The official newspaper of the party was literally flooded with images of and articles on Ceaușescu that depicted him as an important player on the international arena, a leader who managed to balance the rapport of forces between the USA and USSR, between the former and the People's Republic of China or between Palestinians and Israelis. Periodically, *Scînteia* announced the international awards bestowed upon Ceaușescu as a sign of recognition of his efforts for the defence of world peace. Obscured organisations and academies all over the world conferred on him pompous titles such as 'The Man of the Year 1980 – for Peace'¹⁷³ or 'The Special Prize for Peace Telamone' in 1984.¹⁷⁴ Furthermore, the central newspapers devoted a large space to the publication of interviews with foreign personalities, editors and politicians mainly, who underlined the contribution of the Romanian president to securing peace and

¹⁷² Gabriel Andreescu speaks about a 'parody of peace' orchestrated through 'marches, letter signing, meetings and speeches, all under the slogan CEAUSESCU-PACE' which covered the regime's need for propagandistic show and changed the focus from the internal catastrophic situation. Gabriel Andreescu, *Spre o filozofie a disidenței* (București: Ed. Litera, 1992), 46-47.

¹⁷³ The award was granted by a jury of the Indian Academy for National Integration on the basis of 'an ample popular vote organised by the Indian review International Reporter' (cf. *Scînteia Tineretului*, June 26, 1981). The award was given for Ceaușescu's 'remarkable contribution to the promotion of the noble cause of peace and friendship between countries and peoples, to the strengthening and development of the fruitful collaboration between nations.', Ibid.

¹⁷⁴ The prize was awarded by the Centre for the Programming of Social Actions from Agrigento, Italy. As usual the Romanian press devoted a large space to the event. It was reported in the central newspapers that the prize was awarded 'as a token of great esteem and profound homage for the prominent personality of the leader of our state, for the initiatives and contributions of Romania in the fight for securing peace, understanding and collaboration between peoples...' (cf. *Informația Bucureștiului*, December 13, 1984).

good collaboration between nations. For instance, a series of articles entitled 'Conversations with the authors and editors of the books devoted to the president of Romania' started to be published in *România Literară* at the beginning of the 1980s. The series aimed at presenting Ceaușescu as an internationally acclaimed statesman whose actions were defining for the acceleration of the world peace process.

The theme of the Supreme Commander of the Army¹⁷⁵ originates in the same shifting moment in the construction of Ceaușescu's image, namely August 1968. The danger of incursion into Romania by the Soviet troops, as a response to the refusal to participate in the invasion of Czechoslovakia, forced Ceaușescu to design a plan of mass mobilisation. In his famous speech, delivered on August 22, 1968 in front of the people gathered in the Square of the Republic, he announced the initiative of creating patriotic guards, composed of people with no military training:

We have decided that starting from this very moment we should proceed to the creation of armed patriotic guards, composed of workers, peasants, intellectuals, defenders of the independence of our Socialist country.¹⁷⁶

This initiative resulted in a general mobilisation of the country and in a gradual militarisation of all sectors of the public life.¹⁷⁷ Moreover, August 1968 meant the emergence of Ceaușescu's image as the guarantor of Romania's independence, an image that more often than not took mediaeval overtones.¹⁷⁸ The link between the image of Ceaușescu as the perfect leader of Romania and the mediaeval *voievod* is not difficult to establish. The main criteria according to which a *voievod* was

¹⁷⁵ Four images were published on this theme in *Arta*.

¹⁷⁶ *Scînteia*, August 22, 1968.

¹⁷⁷ Lucian Boia speaks about a process of 'militarization' of history that led to the interpretation and writing of history with a special focus on its military aspect. This trend reached the climax when The Centre of Military History, ran by Ilie Ceaușescu, Nicolae Ceaușescu's brother, published under the signature of the former a monumental *Military History of Romanian People* (six volumes, published between 1984 and 1989) that became the 'major' guiding history book of the period along with Ceaușescu's *History of Romania*. See Lucian Boia, *op. cit.*, 80.

¹⁷⁸ '... during his speech [Ceaușescu] emphasised his own role in deepening Romania's independence. After August 1968, the propaganda machine was set in high gear to endorse this fallacy. People must believe that without Ceaușescu, Romania would be turned into a Soviet *protektorat*. He is the demiurge of the country's sovereignty, the Communist *voievod*.' Vladimir Tismăneanu, in *Romania: A Case of Dynastic Communism* (New York: Freedom House, 1989), 30.

evaluated as a good leader were his capacity to defend and maintain the independence and sovereignty of his country through wise foreign policy or efficient military action, to assure the internal welfare of his people and to be an active founder of religious and cultural edifices and institutions. Ceaușescu fully met – or at least this is what the official propaganda attempted to demonstrate – all these criteria. He was the artisan of the new Bucharest as well as of Romania as a modern country in which the difference between town and village was to be erased, the initiator and guarantor of Romania's welfare and the defender of Romania's independence. As the time was not 'proper' for Ceaușescu to prove his military deeds, his public image was constructed along the lines of the internationally known mediator for peace. The painted representations which depict Ceaușescu as the Supreme Commander of the Army render him in the anti-climax moment of the army's inspection or watching military exercises. Although he had been an active general in the fifties, he was never depicted in a military uniform nor did he wear such an outfit after his accession to power.¹⁷⁹ Even in the scenes of army inspection, where a military uniform would have been more appropriate, he wears his work visit suit and the cap.

The second theme - that of the Hero of Peace - emerged later, in the eighties, in a more diffuse way. It cannot be circumscribed to a certain moment but it became an important theme in the construction of his public image. It gave Ceaușescu the opportunity to launch himself in a campaign against the American imperialism and the division of the world following the Cold War and, more importantly, to portray himself and his doctrine of peaceful co-operation between peoples as an alternative to the amounting of tensions and military threats between the two blocks. Moreover, the theme offered to Ceaușescu an allegedly international dimension. In point of

¹⁷⁹ His 1950s episode as a general in the Romanian Army was one which was never evoked by the official propaganda after he came to power. The Romanian Army was one of the main instruments employed in the process of forced collectivisation of the country. Stories about Ceaușescu's personal and brutal intervention in a few cases of peasants' refusal to give up their land surfaced even before 1989 and were more widely commented upon after the end of the regime. Probably Ceaușescu did not want to identify himself at all with this period and that is why he was never depicted in a military uniform. See for Ceaușescu's role in the Army before 1965 Daniel N. Nelson, *Romanian Politics in the Ceaușescu Era* (New York: Gordon and Breach Science Publishers, 1988), 179-180.

fact, this theme was the only one to allude to an important role played by Ceaușescu in the international arena. Whereas images of Ceaușescu while he met foreign officials were generously published in newspapers and constantly showed on television, they were never represented in painting.¹⁸⁰ The only theme that opens Ceaușescu towards the outside world in painting and gives him an international dimension is that of peace. The peak of Ceaușescu's campaign for peace was 1986, when, Romanians, on the leader's initiative,¹⁸¹ were called to engage in a masquerade vote pro peace.¹⁸² All these enterprises had a two fold purpose. They aimed at offering to Ceaușescu, at a time when nationalism had exhausted any trace of appeal among Romanians, an alternative, a new topic seen as being able to sustain the desired mass mobilisation. On the other hand, it gave to Ceaușescu a new space for his own long-constructed cult, it made him believe that he was an arbiter of the world, a man who had the power to influence the destiny of the world. As the quotation below demonstrates, this theme was explicitly stated even in *Arta*:

The decision of Romania to reduce unilaterally the armament, military equipment and expenses, powerfully demonstrates the resolute will of our entire nation of fully getting involved in and of actively participating in the fight for disarmament, for peace, for the forging of a better and more just world on our planet, without weapons and wars, a world of understanding and peaceful collaboration between all nations.¹⁸³

A double discourse was gradually shaped. One direction aimed at developing a discourse that emphasised the imminence of an external peril and that finally

¹⁸⁰ See for a description of the postures in which the leader of Romania was represented in the newsreels while he was receiving foreign guests E. Georgescu, 'Cultul personalității și declinul economic', September 23, 1982, Open Society Archives, *fond* 300-60-1, Box 708.

¹⁸¹ 'Mobilised by the daring thought of Comrade Nicolae Ceaușescu, by the revolutionary humanism that animates the entire life and political activity of our beloved leader, the Romanian people has marked, through his firm option formulated at referendum, a new phase within the process of fighting for peace, a first page of the history when the rationality triumphs.' (*Arta* 11/1986).

¹⁸² The pro peace mass vote took place on November 23, 1986. It was presented by mass media as a unique enterprise, because in this voting also participated teenagers between 14 and 18. The vote had of course a predictable result: 'For the first time in the world, an entire people said a decided YES for disarmament and peace on Earth.' (*Arta*, 11 1986).

¹⁸³ *Arta* 11/1986.

crystallised in the myth of the 'jeopardised motherland'.¹⁸⁴ It exploited the already established motif of the 'country desired by everyone' and the subsequent patriotic feelings that this motif arose among Romanians. The second direction was concerned with the pacifist rhetoric. It highlighted the critical international situation, the drastic measures that should have been taken in order to guarantee peace in the world. Paradoxically, Ceaușescu assumed both hypostases in a perfect congruent rhetoric.

Visual representations followed this double discourse and coalesced into images that depicted Ceaușescu both as the Commander-in-chief of the Army and the fighter for peace. Whilst the images devoted to the first sub-theme were less numerous and more coherent as a group, those representing the Romanian leader as a fighter for world peace outnumbered the previous ones. Additionally, they were more diverse in terms of how the theme was approached.¹⁸⁵ Moreover, although both groups of images gained momentum in the eighties, a slight de-phasing between the two can be noticed. Most of the images representing Ceaușescu as the Supreme Commander of the Army were produced in the first half of the eighties, up to 1984. The second group of images basically coalesced after this date accounting for a change of accent in the development of the theme. Whilst the sub-theme of the Supreme Commander of the Army can be linked with the parochial idea of defence by military means of a jeopardised country - conception that originated in the 1968 moment -, the paintings in the second group attempted to approach the theme from an international perspective and to focus on the image of Ceaușescu as an internationally acknowledged fighter for world peace.

¹⁸⁴ Eugen Negrici, 'Mitul patriei primejduite', in *Miturile comunismului românesc* (Bucharest: Nemira, 1998).

¹⁸⁵ For instance in *Arta* review there were published thirteen paintings related to the above mentioned hypostases. Four of them depicted Ceaușescu as the Supreme Commander of the Army whilst nine attempted to highlight his pacifist orientation.

The sub-theme of the Supreme Commander of the Army usually represents Ceaușescu in front of the soldiers during the inspection of the troops¹⁸⁶ (PLATE 47). As no concrete military threat could have been represented, the depiction of Ceaușescu as commander-in chief was reduced to his depiction while he was examining the troops. The incumbent idea was that of readiness, of vigilance, of full capacity to respond to a potential attack. Furthermore, Ceaușescu was represented as the only one capable - due to his exceptional strategic thinking - of preventing or responding to a potential military conflict. The sub-theme evidently takes over elements from that of the work visits. Like in the 'work visits', Ceaușescu is represented as the Authority, the one who supervised and corrected the inevitable results of human errors. Even the inventory employed is similar to the one used in the work visits theme: Ceaușescu wears the same cap and the same buttoned coat. The solemnity of the moment - Ceaușescu inspects the troops while the latter give him the military honour -, the national and party flags used in excess in these images as well as the implied idea of oath and total submission to the commander-in-chief's orders, potentially give to Ceaușescu a strong hierarchical position. Unfortunately, the artistic quality of the paintings that composed this sub-theme is very low and the depiction of Ceaușescu as the Supreme Commander of the Army is somehow missed. Additionally, his representation in civilian clothes instead of a general's uniform contributes to the diminishing of the solemnity of the moment represented.

The variations within this sub-theme are achieved by the depiction of diverse divisions of the army. Most of the paintings represent Ceaușescu while he listens to the reports or watches different military applications. The soldiers changed their outfits from military aviators¹⁸⁷ (PLATE 48) to naval army or simple soldiers¹⁸⁸ (PLATE 49). Sometimes the reference to the past is very obvious as it happens in the last cited painting realised by Ion Țărălungă (PLATE 49). First of all the title

¹⁸⁶ Gheorghe Ioniță, *Raport oștășesc* (Military Report), 1982. The same artist realised a couple of years later a painting that employed the same construction scheme, depicting Ceaușescu in the same posture and attire whilst the six soldiers appertained this time to a different army division. The painting was entitled *Comandantul suprem în mijlocul militarilor* (The Supreme Commander among Soldiers) and was published in *Arta* 3/1985.

¹⁸⁷ Ion Țărălungă, *Raport Comandantului supreme* (Reporting to the Commander-in-Chief), 1982.

¹⁸⁸ Ion Țărălungă, *Document oștășesc* (Military Document), 1981.

itself has an archaic resonance. The old word *ostăşesc* that is used in the title - instead of its modern equivalent *militar/military* - evokes the idea of the mediaeval *oaste/army* and implicitly that of an idealised mediaeval *voievod* who fought for his country up to the supreme sacrifice. The presence of the horse in the foreground is not a simple comical detail but again a reference to the mediaeval soldier. In addition, the word *document* invokes a freezing time, the treatment of the image as an artefact and its opening towards the future.

In contrast with the numerous representations of Stalin that depict the Soviet leader as a planner of the army's strategy, the paintings rendering Ceauşescu in this hypostasis are very scarce. We found a single painting that alludes to Ceauşescu's qualities as a strategy planner¹⁸⁹ (PLATE 50). In this painting, Ceauşescu is prominently represented in the foreground, his stature being deliberately overemphasised. Not only is his torso excessively exaggerated but, in order to underline Ceauşescu's silhouette, the two figures represented in the background are only schematically rendered. Nevertheless they are higher officers of the Romanian Army and are represented accompanying Ceauşescu in what seems to be a scene in the very 'headquarters' of the Army. Their role is only indicative, as they seem to have no active contribution to the elaboration of the plans. In front of Ceauşescu there is a rolled plan (on a surface that hardly could be identified as a desk) whereby the leader seems to follow the military exercises of which we can catch a glimpse in the background. There is an obvious fracture between the two plans of the picture. Whereas the foreground is designed as the interior of the Army's Headquarters, the background depicts a military application in an open space. Basically the painting accommodates two different moments in time that are linked through the leader's gaze outside the left part of the image. As far as potential cultural models are concerned, they could go back to Stalin's image as the genial military mind, who plans in solitude the strategy of the Red Army. Whereas the accent in Stalin's case

¹⁸⁹ Mihai Mustaţă, *În aplicaţie* (Military Application), 1981.

is put on his skills as a military genius,¹⁹⁰ Ceaușescu is depicted once again as a 'man of action', a leader who does not only elaborate strategies indoors, but supervises their implementation on the field (not a battle field though).

The second sub-theme, Hero of Peace, is far more diverse than the previous one. It includes different groups of images that attempt to convey the idea of peace and to represent Ceaușescu's personal contribution to the preservation of peace. One of the most frequently utilised schemes was that in which the stereotyped image of the pigeon as a symbol of peace appeared. Dan Hatmanu produced probably the most circulated image of Ceaușescu as the Hero of Peace¹⁹¹ (PLATE 51). The Romanian leader is represented while he 'launches' a pigeon who bears in his peak the message of peace of the Romanian people (a piece from the flag of Romania). Similarly, Ceaușescu wears the tri-coloured sash that was usually part of the official presidential outfit. But in this representation, Hatmanu uses the sash in order to underline that Ceaușescu was in fact the bearer of this message into the world, his initiator and main supporter. The very simple composition of this painting and the straightforwardness of the message transformed this work into an emblematic one that had a large circulation in journals and art reviews. There is in Hatmanu's style a sort of naivety and warmth that make his works very accessible. He was a painter of memories, more often about himself, about his youth and native place.¹⁹² His style could be dubbed as a naïve realism with simplified drawing and pure tones of colour. He used a reduced inventory of objects which had usually inadequate dimensions within his compositions or were placed in awkward, unnatural correlations. Sometimes bizarre objects appear in his compositions which give a playful tone to his works or make them having a dreamy atmosphere. Part of these elements can also be identified in the painting analysed here as well as in the one

¹⁹⁰ Like Ceaușescu, Stalin had never gone to the front but at least he had lived thorough the WW2 while in office. Although images depicting heroic deeds on the battlefield were difficult to be produced, he was nevertheless represented in a military uniform as the strategic genius of the Red Army. See, for instance, the painting 'Generalissimus I. V. Stalin' by Fyodor Reshetnikov in Matthew Cullerne Bown, *Art under Stalin* (Oxford: Phaidon, 1991), 176

¹⁹¹ Dan Hatmanu, *Portret* (Portrait), *Art* 10/1984.

¹⁹² Adriana Babu, *Dan Hatmanu* (Bucharest: Meridiane, 1983), 9.

discussed in chapter 1.¹⁹³ They made Ceaușescu's representations more accessible in a warm, sometimes ironical way.

A far more complex composition is the one due to the painter Constantin Nițescu who combines the Ceaușescu-The Hero of Peace theme with other facets of the leader's cult¹⁹⁴ (PLATE 52). Ceaușescu is represented against the red Party flag in a white, highly individualising suit, his right hand raised in a salute. He looks outside the painting as if he responded to the acclamations of an invisible crowd (but suggested through the people whom we can see in the painting). The remaining space within the image can be divided into four areas corresponding to the four corners of the painting. Each of them depicts basically a different theme. In the upper left corner of the image, Nițescu rendered Ceaușescu as a communist underground fighter by inserting into the painting the canonical photographs that were circulated in mass-media when Ceaușescu's revolutionary past was evoked. Even the image of Ceaușescu's native house is depicted in this section of the painting.¹⁹⁵ In the opposite upper corner, it is depicted, in an incipient form, a 'work visit', more precisely the post-instructions phase, that of displaying and admiring the achievements of the Ceaușescu Epoch.¹⁹⁶ The lower right corner of the image is basically devoted to the peace theme. A pro peace demonstration is depicted (the placard in the background reads '*Ceaușescu, Pace/Ceaușescu, Peace*') in which children seem to be the main protagonists. In the lower left corner, the artist represents the 'present', peoples' warm manifestation of gratitude towards a leader who did so much for the welfare of his people and who is such an inspiring example to follow. The theme of peace and the three pigeons flying above Ceaușescu are elements that reinforce the idea of stability and welfare and Ceaușescu's role as guarantor of all these. Another parallel could be drawn between Ceaușescu-the communist fighter and Ceaușescu-the fighter for peace. The juxtaposition of these

¹⁹³ See page 67.

¹⁹⁴ Constantin Nițescu, *Omagiu* (Homage), 1988.

¹⁹⁵ See for the use of these photographs in the construction of Ceaușescu's image as the revolutionary leader the corresponding section in this chapter.

¹⁹⁶ There are very schematically depicted some furnaces. See for this type of image the section on work visits within this chapter.

two themes seems to underpin the leader's continuous fight and commitment to the people's welfare. Whilst in his youth he fought for the cause of communism, he is fighting now for the cause of peace.

A similar type of image is the painting realised by Ion Bitzan¹⁹⁷ (PLATE 53). In a composition of big proportions, Bitzan collates disparate visual quotations and obtains a poly-vocal image. An oversized photograph of the presidential couple¹⁹⁸ while they obviously greet the masses is centrally placed within the painting. In the lower corners of the images there are reproduced fragments from photographs representing people during diverse demonstrations for peace. The placards indicate this un-equivocally ('*Ceaușescu, Pacea* / *Ceaușescu, Peace*'; '*Dezarmare, Pacea* / *Disarmament, Peace*', etc), whereas the pioneers in the foreground are a common element for this theme. Additionally, images of anniversary performances are reproduced in the background as well as effigies of the communist economic development (metro, airplanes, etc). A fragment of Brâncuși's *Poarta Sărutului* (The Kiss Gate) is also reproduced in Bitzan's work. Therefore, the message of this painting is again very complex. The Romanian people totally supports the fight for peace initiated by its most active champion against disarmament, Nicolae Ceaușescu, in order to protect the country's past (Brâncuși), future (children) and present (the achievements of the Golden Epoch¹⁹⁹ - industrialisation, modernisation, technology). Furthermore, it gives thanks to the presidential couple (stadium shows) for their parental care and their commitment to the improvement of welfare and stability in Romania.

A sub-theme related to that of peace is the one representing the presidential couple among children. This theme is one of high frequency in the iconographies of the twentieth century dictators; images of Mussolini and Stalin while they hugged and

¹⁹⁷ Ion Bitzan, *Tovarășul Nicolae Ceaușescu și tovarășa Elena Ceaușescu* (Comrade Nicolae Ceaușescu and Comrade Elena Ceaușescu), 1981.

¹⁹⁸ In point of fact, there is not reproduced the whole photograph but only the silhouettes of the two leaders.

¹⁹⁹ Maybe the golden strip used in the picture is not fortuitous.

kissed little children were produced in large quantities.²⁰⁰ Whilst the main purpose of these images was the portrayal of these leaders in a more human, gentle light, they played yet another role: their image was used as a token for future, continuity and better life. Therefore, the use of children in images dealing with the theme of peace and, vice-versa, the implied idea of peace and future stability in images representing children, became something common. Maybe the most suggestive painting in the group representing the presidential couple among children is the one realised by Sabin Bălaşa²⁰¹ (PLATE 54). The artist, as we have mentioned earlier, has a very distinct style and his many works are usually populated by mythical figures projected on cloudy, blue surfaces. This style helped him in the elaboration of this topic as the manner in which he depicted the Ceauşescus, the children and the entire surface around them suggested indeed a propensity towards future. Furthermore, the obvious movement of marching forward of all the personages represented within the painting was another device used in order to underline the temporal orientation within the image. The children in the left part of the image had the most ample movement as if they happily ran towards a better future. In addition, the gazes projected outside the image amplified the idea of stepping out from the present, of watching something that was already distinct and articulated in the future. The blue of the waving background and the immaculate white of the dresses that Elena Ceauşescu and the girl wore should also be read as indicators of the bright future towards which all were marching as if the stepping outside the present into the future required a sort of ritual ablution. The mild wind that was blowing from the direction in which gazes and movements converged stressed the connection with the future as if a 'message' from that temporally distant moment was brought to those represented in the painting. The doves depicted in the right half of the image functioned as indicators of this bright future, as a warranty that the marching forward under the guidance of Ceauşescu was the only way to maintain and improve the peaceful and happy life of the Romanian people.

²⁰⁰ Catriona Kelly, 'Grandpa Lenin and Uncle Stalin: Soviet Leader cult for Little Children', in Balázs Apor et al. (eds.) *The Leader Cult in Communist Dictatorships, Stalin and the Eastern Bloc* (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2004).

²⁰¹ Sabin Bălaşa, *Tineri între tineri* (Young among the Young), 1983.

Other images within this sub-theme represent the presidential couple in a more conventional posture: the Ceaușescus literally among children. These paintings depict the two leaders screened by children who are dressed up either as pioneers, in the ‘Hawks of the Motherland’ uniforms or in folk costumes. Vasile Pop Negreșteanu uses a more temperate scheme in which the Ceaușescus are fully visible while the children are grouped around the two leaders²⁰² (PLATE 55). Nicolae and Elena Ceaușescu are represented in postures characteristic for Negreșteanu’s style: Nicolae Ceaușescu, the leader saluting his people; Elena Ceaușescu, the savant, slightly aloof, with a book and a flower in her hands, the symbols of her professional status and of her gender. The style of the painting is very flat, the figures lack volume, they seem unrelated to and uneasy about each other. Furthermore, Negreșteanu’s painting looks like an inventory of symbols (the leaders, the children, the pigeons, the book, etc) adequately used in order to convey a message. But the general feeling that the painting transmits is rather that of cheerlessness and remoteness. A totally different feeling is transmitted by Constantin Nițescu’s work entitled *Omagiu* (Homage)²⁰³ (PLATE 56). The composition is dynamic, fluid; there is a certain rhythm, the sensation that we watch a changing framework. The children are frantically happy. They smile, clap, they offer flowers to the two leaders. Their excitement echoes the happiness and satisfaction of the presidential couple as if the image described a big, joyful family. Nicolae and Elena Ceaușescu are depicted here as ‘real parents’, who take care of their children and, in return, receive their gratitude. The children’s happiness should also be read as an indicator of the careless, protected childhood that they presumably lived during the Ceaușescu Epoch.

A different visual scheme employed in order to convey the idea of peace and of Ceaușescu as a fighter for peace was proposed by Geta Mermeze²⁰⁴ (PLATE 57). She uses the image of Ceaușescu as an effigy-like portrait within a larger

²⁰² Vasile Pop Negreșteanu, *Omagiu* (Homage), 1986.

²⁰³ Constantin Nițescu, *Omagiu* (Homage), 1985.

²⁰⁴ Geta Mermeze, *Marșul păcii* (The March of Peace), 1984.

composition in which the main topic seems to be a group of people who march for peace. The portrait of Ceaușescu within the painting functions as a stimulant, an inspiration for others who fight for the cause of peace as well as a guarantor that the fight will continue. It is positioned above the group of people, protected by a rainbow, and it seems to have an icon-like power. This type of representation – the leader's figure within a painting that seems to have a 'neutral' topic - resembles those in which Stalin's image was used as a warranty of welfare, progress and change in the Soviet Union.²⁰⁵ This is, in fact, the ultimate idealisation of the leader, when even his image alone can exercise a positive influence upon other people. The style of Mermeze's painting is very severe. In order to underline people's determination in their fight for peace, the artist opted for sculptural, elongated silhouettes and expressionless faces. In spite of the painting's title (*The March of Peace*) and the inscription above people's heads which reads: 'Romania's youth wants peace!', little indicates that people actually move forward. Their force is rather static and it seems to concretise in defending and supporting the leader's message for peace. They look like a protective 'structure' around the leader and not like the initiators of the fight for peace. Mermeze, a painter with vast experience in historical and social topics, managed through her style to transform Ceaușescu into the main actor, although his representation seems at a first glance isolated within the painting.

To conclude this chapter, Ceaușescu's iconography encompassed a few distinct themes that followed basically the themes developed by the official propaganda. The cult of Ceaușescu in painting started to emerge towards the middle of the seventies and focused at the beginning on the themes that were already well crystallised in other media: the Romanian leader as a national hero (*The Official Portrait*) and Ceaușescu as a implementer of the communist doctrine in a direct,

²⁰⁵ For instance, Stalin's image (portrait) in A. Laktionov's *In the New Flat* (1951) See for the description of this painting Jörn Guldberg, 'Socialist Realism as Institutional Practice: Observations on the Interpretation of the Works of Art of the Stalin Period', in Hans Günther (ed.) *The Culture of the Stalin Period* (New York, London: St. Martins Press, in association with the School of Slavonic and East European Studies, University of London, 1990), 169-170 and Svetlana Boym, *Common Places, Mythologies of Everyday Life in Russia* (Cambridge, Massachusetts: Harvard University Press, 1994), 5-10.

active way, through a permanent contact with the working people and an attentive supervision (The Work Visits). In the eighties, when the Ceaușescu regime entered its declining phase (along with the leader's own physical deterioration), the propaganda focused on those aspects of the cult that would compensate for the decaying reality. As a consequence, themes like the communist underground fighter (the ailing leader in contrast with the exceptionally young and courageous communist fighter) or the fighter for world peace (an isolated statesman on the international arena who tries to gain visibility through his campaign for disarmament and peace) began to appear in painting. These representations tried to deny the crumbling reality, to create a fictitious one in which Romania was a country that had a say in international affairs and its leader was a statesman with an exceptional profile. But this compensating mechanism was sometimes accompanied by a reverse one, by a subtle and ironical, we could say, depiction of reality. In other words, Ceaușescu was sometimes represented as an estranged leader who was not able to connect with his people anymore. Consciously or not, artists started to depict the leader in awkward positions (Bitzan, Șetran) that would impair his officially constructed image and would basically hint at the flaws of the system. Furthermore, artists managed to catch on their canvases the defective syntax between the leader and the led by representing the Romanian leader in half-gestures of interaction with the masses (Ceaușescu saluting a crowd that is not visible or Ceaușescu represented in the foreground against a crowd whom he does not see). Scholars who would like to compare the Romanian case with the way in which Stalin's image in painting was constructed might be surprised by the veiled allusions that the Romanian artists inserted in their works. This unexpected attitude was the result of a different relationship between Ceaușescu and his people as compared with the Soviet case. Whilst Stalin was a leader who fascinated the people and who was loved by the large masses, Ceaușescu managed to have a genuine relationship with his people only at the very beginning of his rule. Gradually, the Romanian leader became isolated and his image as the Father of the Nation was only a propaganda construct without any real basis. The obvious gap between propaganda and reality probably made artists perceive Ceaușescu as he really was and they gradually started to

encompass veiled allusions and ironies in their works. This timid yet obvious process sets apart Ceaușescu's iconography from that of his Soviet predecessor.

Another phenomenon that appeared in the eighties was the contamination of themes, a process that resulted in paintings that addressed more than one aspect of Ceaușescu's cult. As we have previously seen, polyphonic paintings started to emerge, in which the main theme was accompanied and reinforced by one or more complementary sub-themes. The polyphonic message was usually achieved through the careful intermingling of different themes (for instance, 'Ceaușescu, the champion of the fight for world peace' mixed with Ceaușescu, friend and protector of children) or through the employment of a title that would add a new meaning to the theme depicted (a painting catalogued as a 'work visit' which has instead the appearance of a 'veneration scene'). Other times, the polyphony of a painting resulted from the juxtaposition of different themes within the same canvas. Practically, the surface of the painting was divided into a few areas and each of them was decorated with a different theme. The themes were arranged either according to the composition of a biographical icon or they had a looser configuration which made more difficult the reading at a first glance. Nevertheless, they always followed a temporal axis that tried to emphasise the intermingling destiny of Romania with that of its leader. Scenes depicting the revolutionary youth of Ceaușescu and his fight for a popular democracy in Romania stood next to those that showed the great achievements of the communist period. Furthermore, the presence of children in scenes in which they showed their love and gratitude towards the leader often completes these representations of Ceaușescu. The children suggest the bright and happy future of Romania which was made possible by the fight, determination and clear vision of Ceaușescu.

The most distinct aspect of Ceaușescu's iconography was probably the style in which his paintings were realised. In contrast with the classical model of Stalin's iconography, which in many cases, as we have seen, was a source of inspiration as far as the thematic content was concerned, the paintings devoted to Ceaușescu

followed a local, traditional style that had little in common with the mainstream socialist realism. The vast majority of the paintings representing Ceaușescu were realised in a flat, volume-less style that resembled the Byzantine mural painting and the graphic drawing of folk art. The lack of perspective, the linear alignment of figures and their hanging into the air were other elements taken over from the Byzantine painting. In addition, the way painters used colours, which were very often applied on big surfaces without variations and nuances, was another reminiscent of the mural painting. The predilection of the Romanian artists for this style is not difficult to explain. As we have tried to show all along this research, the return to the local artistic tradition was part of an ampler phenomenon which was initiated by the political leadership in the middle of the sixties. This phenomenon, characterised by a strong nationalist stand and an obstinate declaration of Romania's 'own way', became the predominant pillar of Ceaușescu regime and gradually encompassed all fields and disciplines. At least two reasons could account for the success of this phenomenon in the field of art. Firstly, the return to national values and to the local artistic tradition implicitly, was not only an initiative from above that fell on a hostile territory. Artists reciprocated with enthusiasm to Ceaușescu's plan and fully engaged in supporting it. Their enthusiasm was the result of the fact that the two-decade long model of socialist realism had been abolished and that a strong interwar trend of praising the local tradition had been revived. Secondly, from the beginning of the seventies when the period of liberalisation ended abruptly and all alternative Western artistic influences were condemned as incompatible with the Romanian communist society, the only model left as a source of inspiration was the local traditional one. It is therefore not surprising at all that the art produced during Ceaușescu regime was heavily influenced by the Byzantine mural painting and the Romanian folk art, that Ceaușescu's portraits imitated the votive portraits as far as their attitude, drawing and colours were concerned, that, in general, the paintings devoted to the Romanian leader were so different in terms of style from the classical socialist realist pattern.

Conclusion

The cult of Ceaușescu in communist Romania was one of the most extensive cults that emerged in the communist system since Stalin's time. It spread over a period of almost twenty-five years and it manifested in various media. It was built on rudiments of Marxist-Leninist doctrine mixed with powerful nationalist tenets and was disseminated through different forms of mass propaganda. It resembled the master cult of Stalin yet it developed its specific features perfectly adapted to the Romanian reality. Although painting was not considered an appropriate medium to distribute the leader's image on a large scale, it had its definite and consistent place within the forms of cult production. The painted representations of Ceaușescu are a corpus of images that faithfully registered the shifts that occurred in his cult and whose investigation sheds light on its particularities and details.

The hypothesis that this study asserted was that Ceaușescu's cult was not a simple copy of the Soviet pattern but the result of a concoction between communist dogma, nationalism, local political and artistic traditions and the Stalinist model. Ceaușescu's visual image incorporated all these trends and took a form that equally reminds us of the classical manner of portraying the communist leader and of the visual schemes employed to depict the local mediaeval rulers. Furthermore, this study assumed that, among the various forms that the cult of Ceaușescu took, his visual representations were the best example of how local visual patterns were employed and absorbed into the elaboration of the leader's cult.

The purpose of employing old visual schemes in the construction of Ceaușescu's visual image is not difficult to grasp. The image was used in the communist period in order to embody the multiple attributes of the leader in a form that could be

repeated, distributed and elaborated for purposes of legitimation and persuasion. Its purpose was to disseminate effectively the message that the leadership wanted to transmit. Therefore, in order to be politically efficient, the visual image had to be conceived according to strict rules of construction and employment. The most important ones were the accessibility and comprehensibility of the message conveyed through the agency of the image. In addition, in order to reach its purpose, the image had to be utilised in a repetitive way that would reinforce again and again the specific message. This study attempted to verify all these hypotheses through the exploration of Ceaușescu's iconography. The investigation proved the validity of the above assumptions and reached several conclusions.

Ceaușescu did use visual images as a political tool in order to transmit specific messages. However, painting was not his preferred medium of cult dissemination. He was more interested in those forms of his cult which had an obvious mass component, which involved a *mass actor* or a *mass viewer*. In other words, he was fascinated with stadium performances and vast architectural projects. The mass performances on stadiums gave him the impression that all those dancers, actors, singers, workers, pioneers, and so on, were performing for him, for his own satisfaction. He was the viewer, the *only viewer* of these shows performed by a *mass actor*. The vast architectural projects that he initiated and meticulously supervised speak about the same relationship of power as the stadium performances. Hundreds of thousands of hands were working for the leader in order to build up the communist dream that the leader had envisioned. Ceaușescu's obsession with architectural constructions can be read in other way too. He was the only designer of (the *only actor* in) the construction of those vast projects that could be admired by numberless viewers (*mass viewer*).

Apart from this type of interpretation of Ceaușescu's predilection for mass demonstrations/stadium performances and for vast architectural projects there is also a second kind of explanation. Ceaușescu was obsessed with his place in history. One of the most distinct purposes of his cult was to carve a place for himself in the

gallery of national heroes. For that reason, he massively employed a nationalist rhetoric and actively oversaw the orchestration of celebrations devoted to past historical figures. He made use of these historical figures in order to shape his own image in a historical perspective. Furthermore, he employed architecture as a means of immortalising his name. The vastness of his architectural projects, the amount of time and money put into these projects demonstrate his will to transform his epoch into one of a different type that would be remembered as the Golden Age of Romanian history. Ceaușescu wanted indeed to conquer time, to master equally the past and the future.

Ceaușescu's interest in painting was far less strong than his interest in mass performances and architecture. Partly due to his very basic artistic education, to his incapacity to grasp other forms than the figurative ones and partly due to his perception of painting as an incomplete means of mass persuasion, the attention he paid to the fine arts in general was limited. In the first years of his rule he had a benevolent attitude towards artists whose support he attempted to gain. Nevertheless, his attitude changed after the 1971 Asian tour which reconfirmed his belief in means of mass mobilisation. The issue of the July Theses marked the beginning of the Romanian 'mini-cultural revolution' within which visual image became a simple additional agitation tool meant to transmit messages in accordance with the official ideological line. The central tenets of the new cultural policy inaugurated by the July Theses were to be ceaselessly reinforced through speeches, directives, meetings and the rhetoric maintained practically unchanged until the end of the regime. The cult of Ceaușescu propagated through visual images started to appear in this changing ideological atmosphere and to compete with other forms of cult production. Although never central within the cult, visual image received wide circulation through newspapers and homage volumes and aimed to render Ceaușescu as the perfect embodiment of all positive national features, as the utmost personage in the history of Romania.

The investigation of Ceaușescu's iconography demonstrates that the Soviet pattern fused with traditional schemes of representing the leader. Whilst most of the themes seem to echo the hypostases in which Stalin was represented, their stylistic realisation is in stark contrast with the Stalinist pattern. This particularity of Ceaușescu's iconography was due to the accent put on national art and the promotion of national values in the cultural field. The massive re-orientation towards the national past and especially towards the autochthonous Dacian roots had a strong influence upon various humanist fields. The impact upon the discipline of history was particularly disrupting as history was employed most in order to shape Ceaușescu's cult. The field of art was affected as well both at the level of discourse and at that of art creation per se. The discourse on national art played initially a very important part in the resurrection of certain topics and in directing artists' attention to traditional visual schemes and styles. It also smoothed the connection between ancient art and that produced in the Ceaușescu regime. Moreover, the discourse on national art attempted to justify the validity and modernity of certain styles and currents that were considered specific to Romanian art. Gradually, a powerful trend influenced by folk and mediaeval art started to emerge which was to become central in the construction of Ceaușescu's image. In the attempt to render Ceaușescu as the quintessential national hero visual schemes employed in the church and icon art were resuscitated and put into circulation. He started to be depicted in hieratic, frontal postures typical for the Byzantine tradition and for the way the mediaeval rulers of the Romanian Principalities had been represented. Moreover, in some of his representations artists explicitly used religious symbols and visual schemes specific to icon painting. In addition, the obviously linear style of most of his representations was not an idiosyncrasy but the result of a relatively powerful tendency in Romanian art which drew massively on folk and mediaeval mural art.

The iconography of Ceaușescu is very coherent. It encompasses a few well-defined themes that were developed and circulated across time without big variations. This is not to say that the themes themselves did not evolve in time. They developed

around well-defined nuclei, always maintaining their consistency and their own profile. Basically the themes followed closely the development of the leader's public image. There was an almost perfect connection between the development of a certain theme in reality and the alterations that can be observed in the construction of the same theme in painting. In other words, the evolution of Ceaușescu's real image was followed by the recording of these changes in his painted representations. The most telling example in this sense is the 'Work Visits' theme which followed strictly the transformations and augmentations which occurred in the eighties in the rituals of welcoming the presidential couple. This stereotype can be interpreted in two ways. First, it can account for a deliberate choice of Ceaușescu to promote his image along strictly defined lines and to reinforce a certain type of leader (the national hero, the active constructor of communism, the underground revolutionary and so on). This stereotyped image theoretically contributed to a better dissemination of the leader's image within different strata, to a much easier and more rapid reading and comprehension of the message transmitted through that particular image. Second, the lack of variety within certain themes can be the result of artists' genuine disinterest in exploring and developing further a 'subject' in which they were not interested. The poor artistic quality of many of the paintings representing Ceaușescu can be interpreted in this sense. Painters produced works that usually had little value in terms of inner aesthetic value but that reached the purpose for which they were made. It seems that painters understood too well the rules of the game, the fact that quantity mattered more than quality in the Ceaușescu regime.

On the other hand, it can be argued that Ceaușescu's iconography gains its 'diversity' from the fact that encompasses and depicts complementary facets of the leader. Although each theme has its coherence and little variations occurred in their development, they illustrate opposite (paired) features. Ceaușescu is at the same time a champion of fighting for peace and a military active leader. He is a dynamic, down to earth leader who goes to the smallest village and speaks there with the most

humble person but he also can 'communicate' with great historical figures of the Romanian past and stand remote and motionless in a gallery of national heroes.

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II. NEWSPAPERS AND PERIODICALS IN ROMANIAN:

Arta

Contemporanul

Era Socialistă

Femeia

Flacăra

Informația Bucureștiului

Luceafărul

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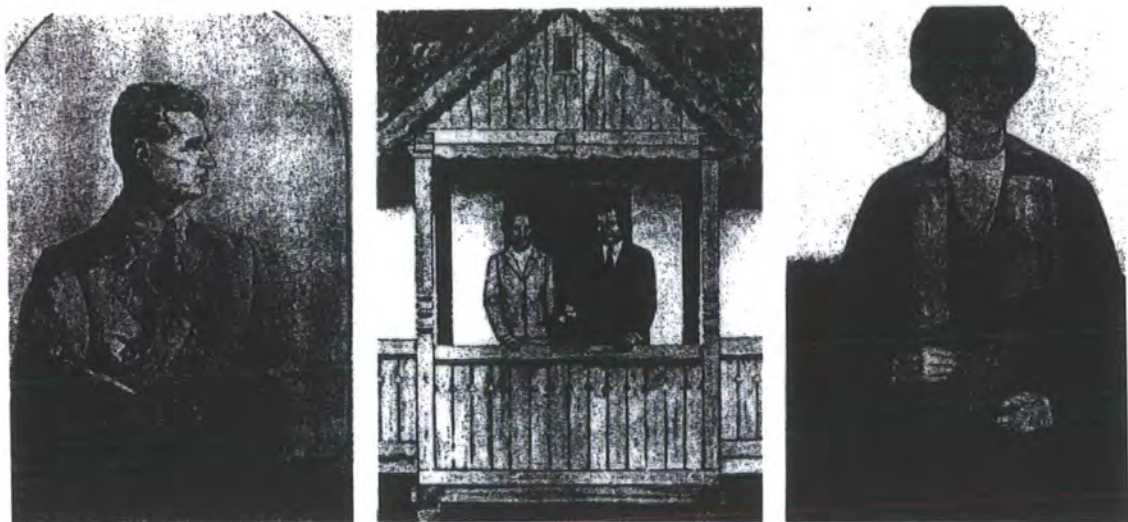
Figure 1, *Image from the exhibition entitled 'The Golden Age, Homage to our Beloved Leader Nicolae Ceaușescu', 1986*



Figure 2, *Image from the exhibition entitled 'The Golden Age, Homage to our Beloved Leader Nicolae Ceaușescu, 1986*



Figure 3, Adrian Dumitrache, *Casa părintească* (Native House), 1984



omagiul

Figure 4, Arta 1/1984 Ion Octavian Penda, *Portret* (Portrait), 1984
Natalia Matei Teodorescu. *Portret* (Portrait), 1984

1. ION OCTAVIAN PENDA: *Portret*
2. ADRIAN DUMITRACHE: *Casa părintească*
3. NATALIA MATEI TEODORESCU: *Portret*
4. ION TARĂLUNGĂ: *Document estăvăsc*
5. DORU ROTARU: *În mijlocul copiilor*

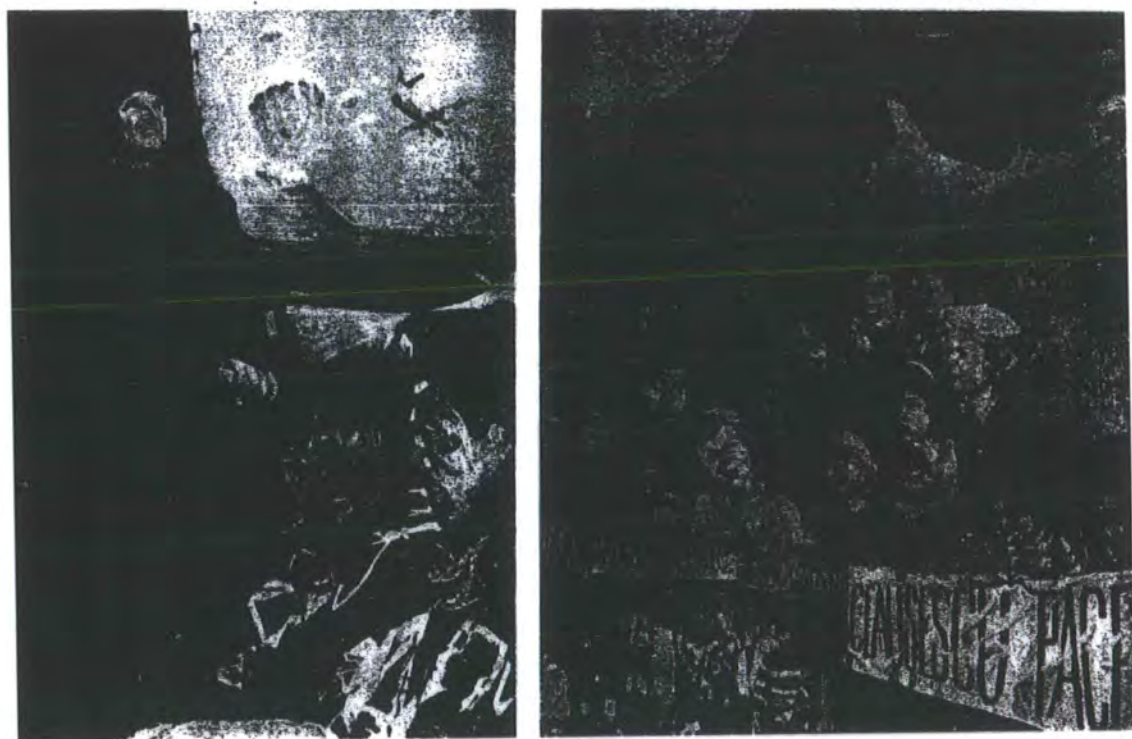


Figure 4, Arta 1/1984, Ion Octavian Penda, *Portret* (Portrait); Adrian Dumitrache, *Casa părintească* (Native Home); Natalia Matei Teodorescu, *Portret* (Portrait)



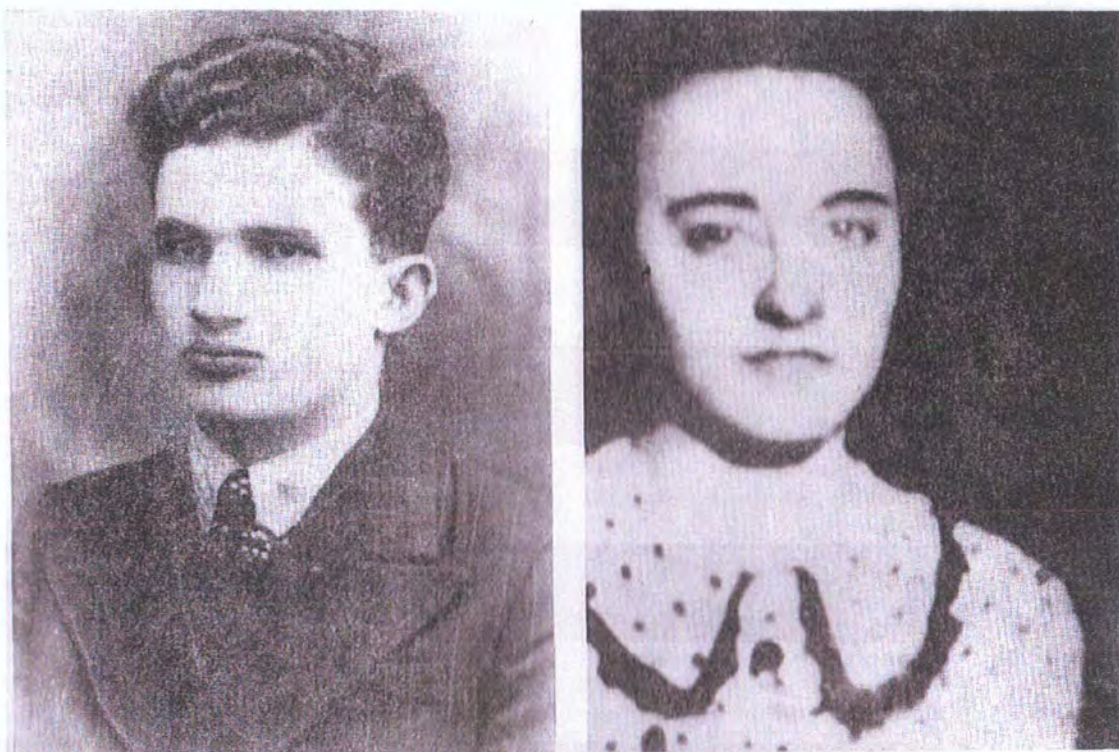
Figure 5, Constantin Nițescu, *Omăgiu* (Homage), 1980, 195 x 195



Figure 6, *Voievod Bălea*, Church of Crișcior, end of the 14th century



Figure 7, Radu Solovăstru, *Conducătorul* (The Leader), 1978

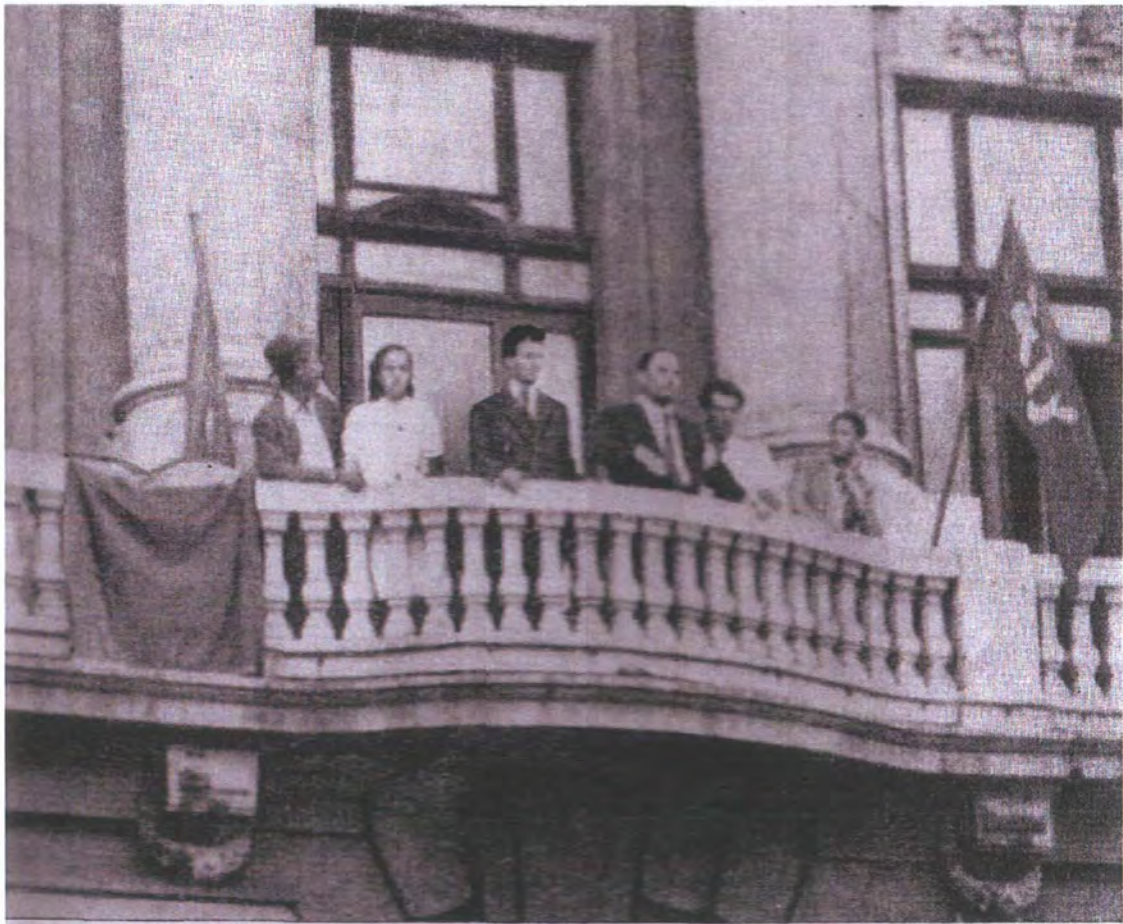


Tovarășul Nicolae Ceaușescu și tovarășa Elena Petrescu (Ceaușescu) în anii marilor bătălii de clasă împotriva exploatării, a pericolului fascist, pentru salvarea integrității teritoriale a patriei

Figure 8, *Nicolae and Elena Ceaușescu as young revolutionaries, second half of the 1930s*



Figure 9, Eftimie Modâlcă, *File de istorie* (Pages of History), 1986



Tovarășul Nicolae Ceaușescu și tovarășa Elena Ceaușescu
la mitingul din Piața Universității de la sfârșitul lunii august 1944,
adresînd maselor populare înfîcîrăta chemare
«Total pentru front, totul pentru victorie!»

Figure 10, *Comrade Nicolae Ceaușescu and Comrade Elena Ceaușescu,*
Meeting in Piața Universității, August 1944

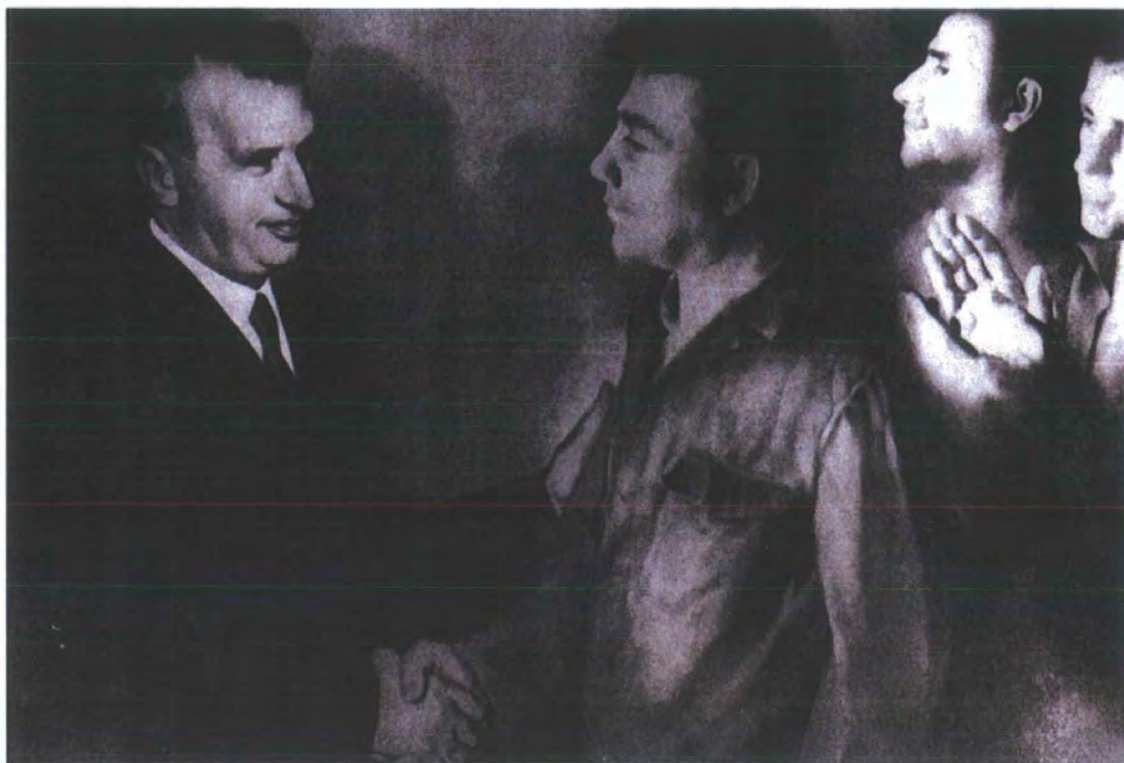


Figure 11, Corneliu Brudașcu, *Vizită de lucru* (Work Visit), 1974



Figure 12, Ion Bitzan, Vladimir Șetran, *Salutul* (The Greeting), 1983



Figure 13, *Vizită de lucru* (Work Visit)

Din inițiativa tovarășului
Nicolae Ceaușescu,
Bucureștiul și-a înnobilit chipul, înnoind
și întinerind riul Dimbovița,
de care și-a legat existența și istoria



Figure 14, *Elena and Nicolae Ceaușescu during a work visit in Bucharest, c. 1985*



Figure 15, Vasile Pop Negreșteanu, *Vizită de lucru* (Work Visit)



Plate 1, Image from the exhibition entitled '65 Years since the Creation of the Romanian Communist Party', 1986



Plate 2, Constantin Piliuță, *Întîiul președinte* (The First President), 1977, 230 x 280



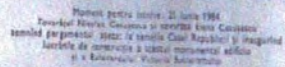
Plate 3, Vasile Pop Negreșteanu, *Tovarășul Nicolae Ceaușescu în dialog cu locuitorii județului Călărași* (Comrade Nicolae Ceaușescu in dialogue with the inhabitants of Călărași county), 1988, 200 x 250



Plate 4, Elena and Nicolae Ceaușescu watching a stadium performance, 1970s

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FINANCIALS



the works of the New Civic Centre, 1984



Plate 6, Dan Hatmanu, *Casa Republicii* (The House of the Republic), 1989, 200 x 220

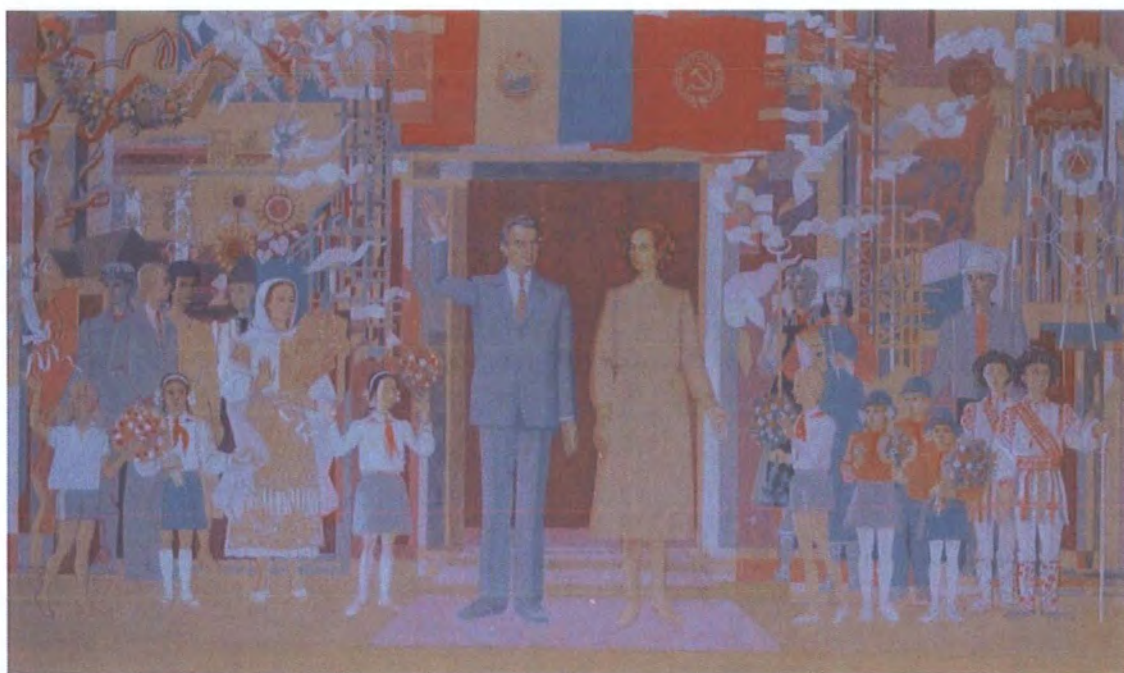


Plate 7, Vasile Pop Negreșteanu, *Compoziție cu Nicolae Ceaușescu și Elena Ceaușescu*
(Composition with Nicolae Ceaușescu and Elena Ceaușescu), 1987, 200 x 240



Plate 8, Nicolae Constantin, *Omagiu* (Homage), 1978, 150 x 170

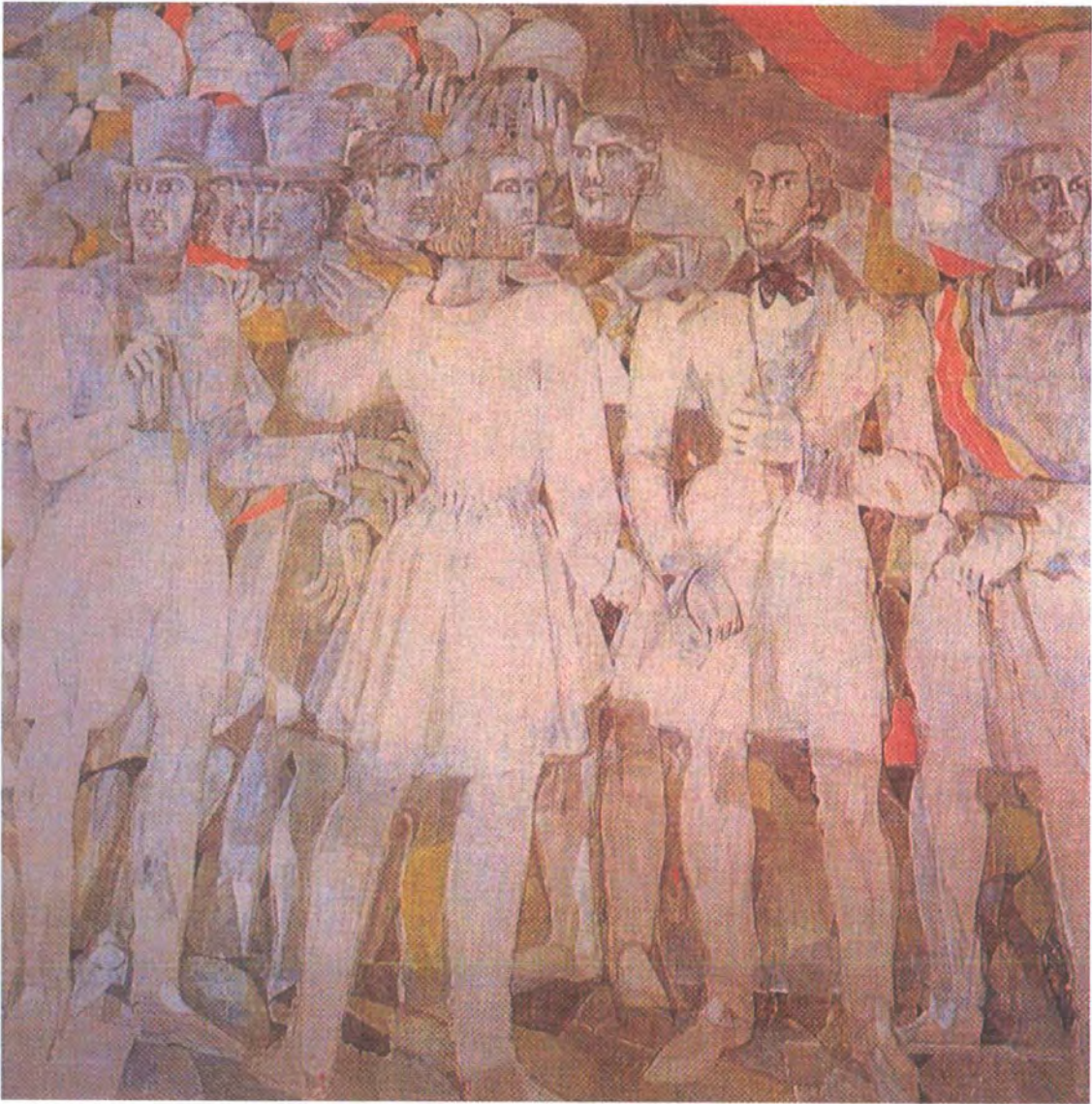


Plate 9, Virgil Almășanu, *Revoluționari la 1848* (Revolutionaries at 1848), 1978

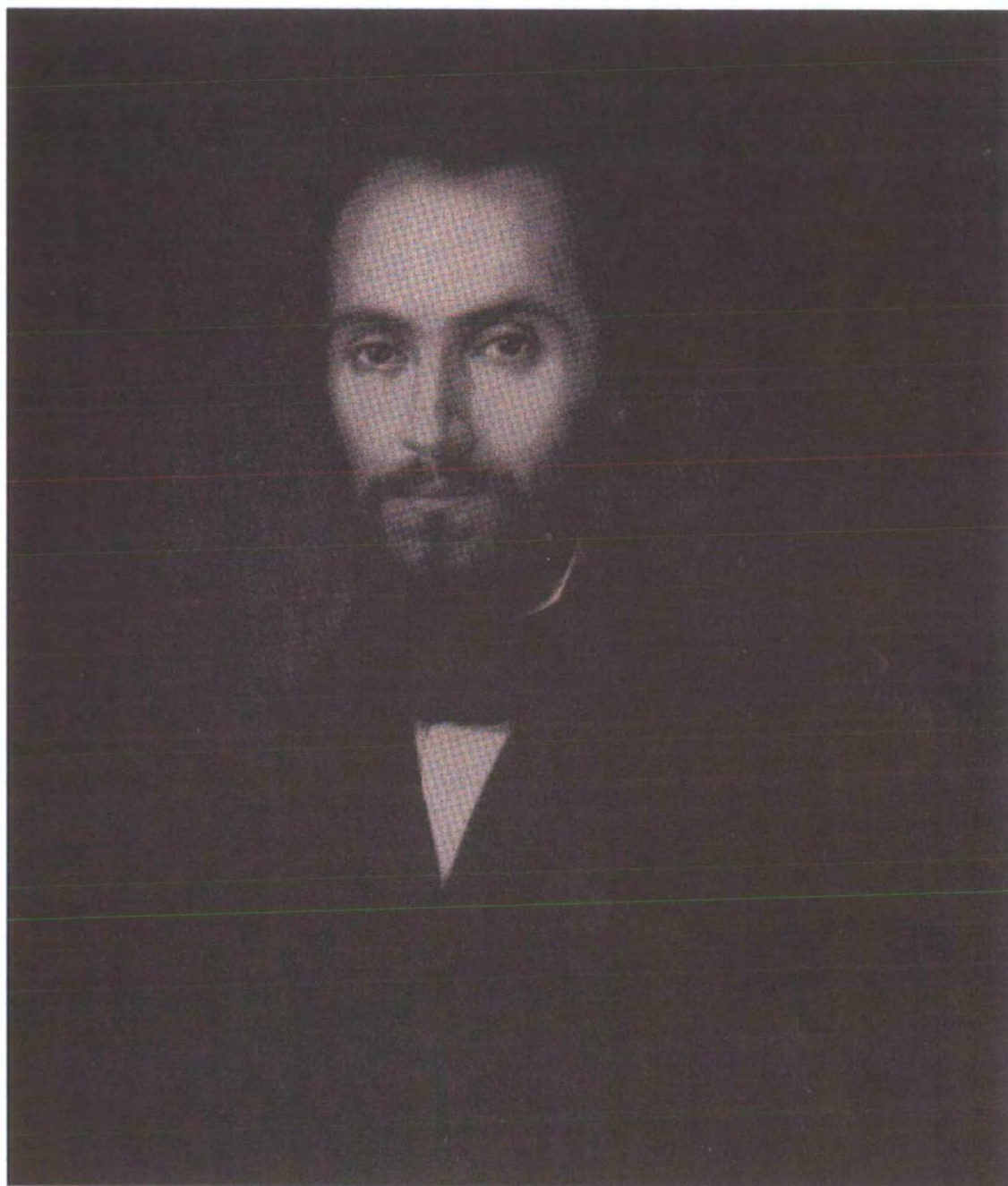


Plate 10, Gheorghe Tattarescu, *Nicolae Bălcescu*, 1851



Plate 11, *Mircea the Old*, Monastery of Curtea de Argeș, 1526

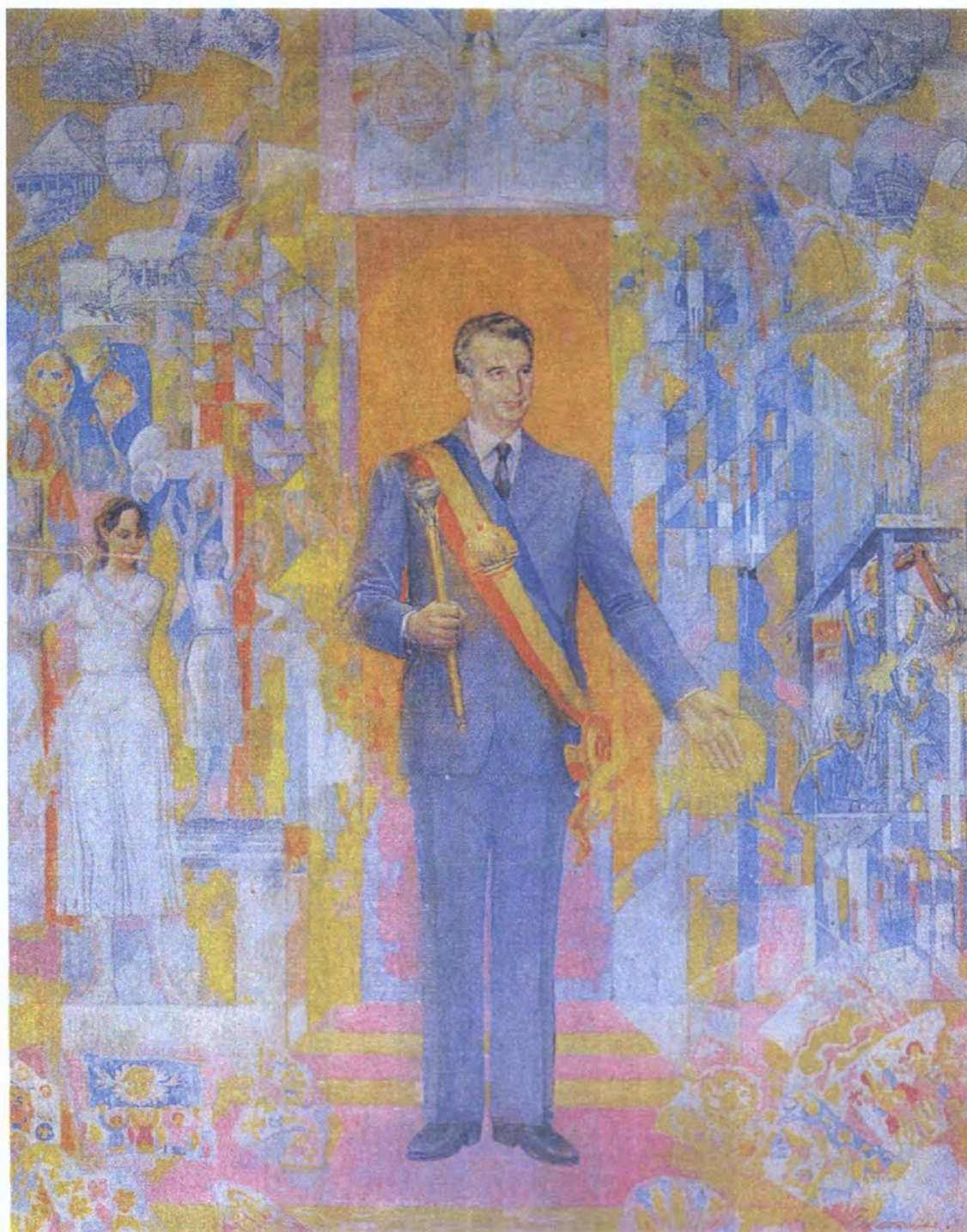


Plate 12, Vasile Pop Negreșteanu, *Omagiu* (Homage), 1987, 195 x 250



Plate 13, *Saints Andronikos and Platon*, Monastery of Golia, Iași, 1659-1661



Plate 14, Corneliu Brudașcu, *Tovarășul Nicolae Ceaușescu* (Comrade Nicolae Ceausescu), 1978,
175 x 310



Plate 15, Doru Rotaru, *Omagiu* (Homage), 1978, 175 x 230

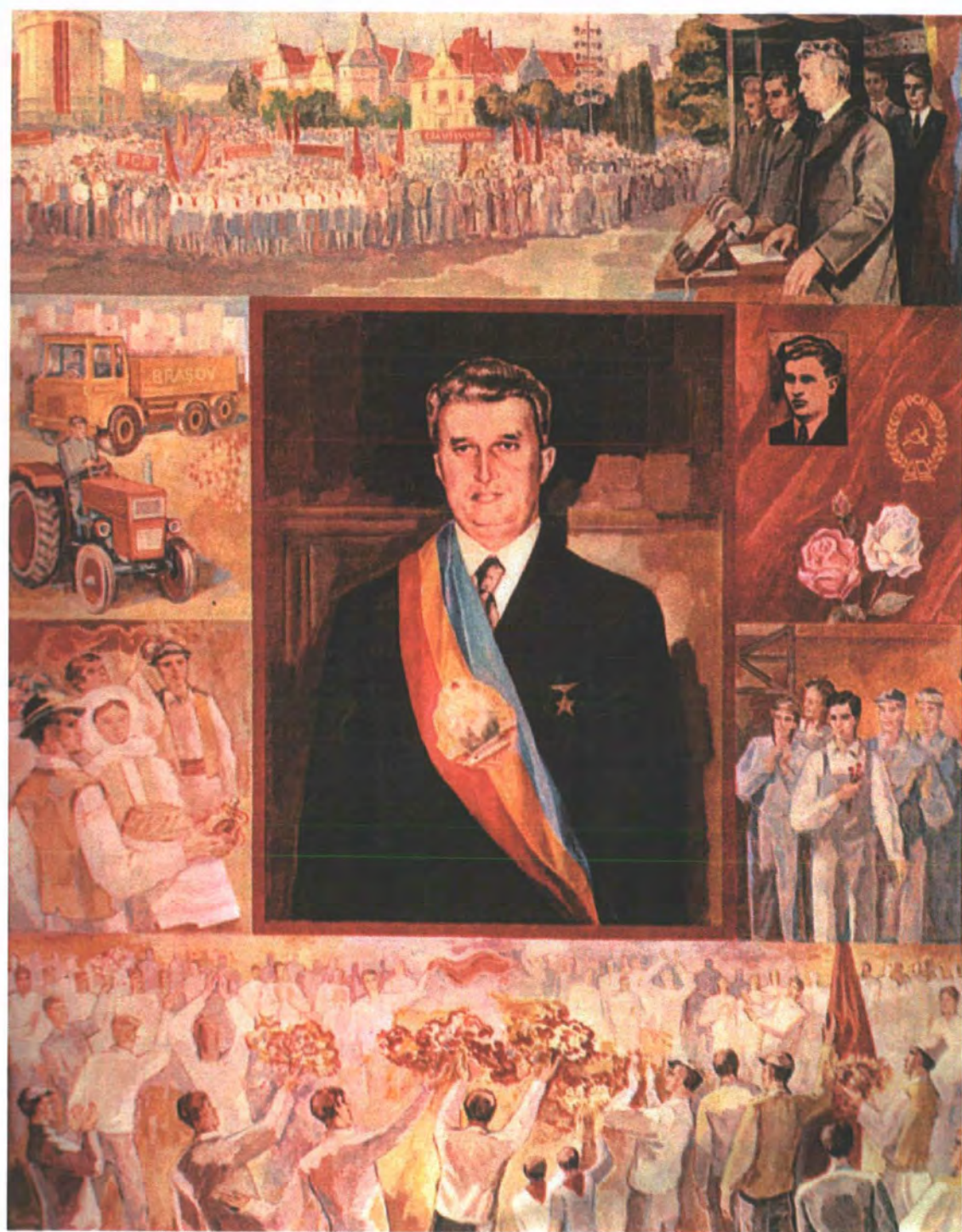


Plate 16, Eftimie Modâlcă, *Omăgiu* (Homage), 1977, 150 x 185



Plate 17, Sabin Bălașa, *Omăgiu* (Homage), 1977, 200 x 220



Plate 18, Eugen Palade, *Salutul președintelui către țară*
(The President's Salute to the Country), 1985, 180 x 310



Plate 19, Eugen Palade, *Tovarășul Nicolae Ceaușescu și tovarășa Elena Ceaușescu*
(Comrade Nicolae Ceaușescu and Comrade Elena Ceaușescu), 1989, 175 x 315

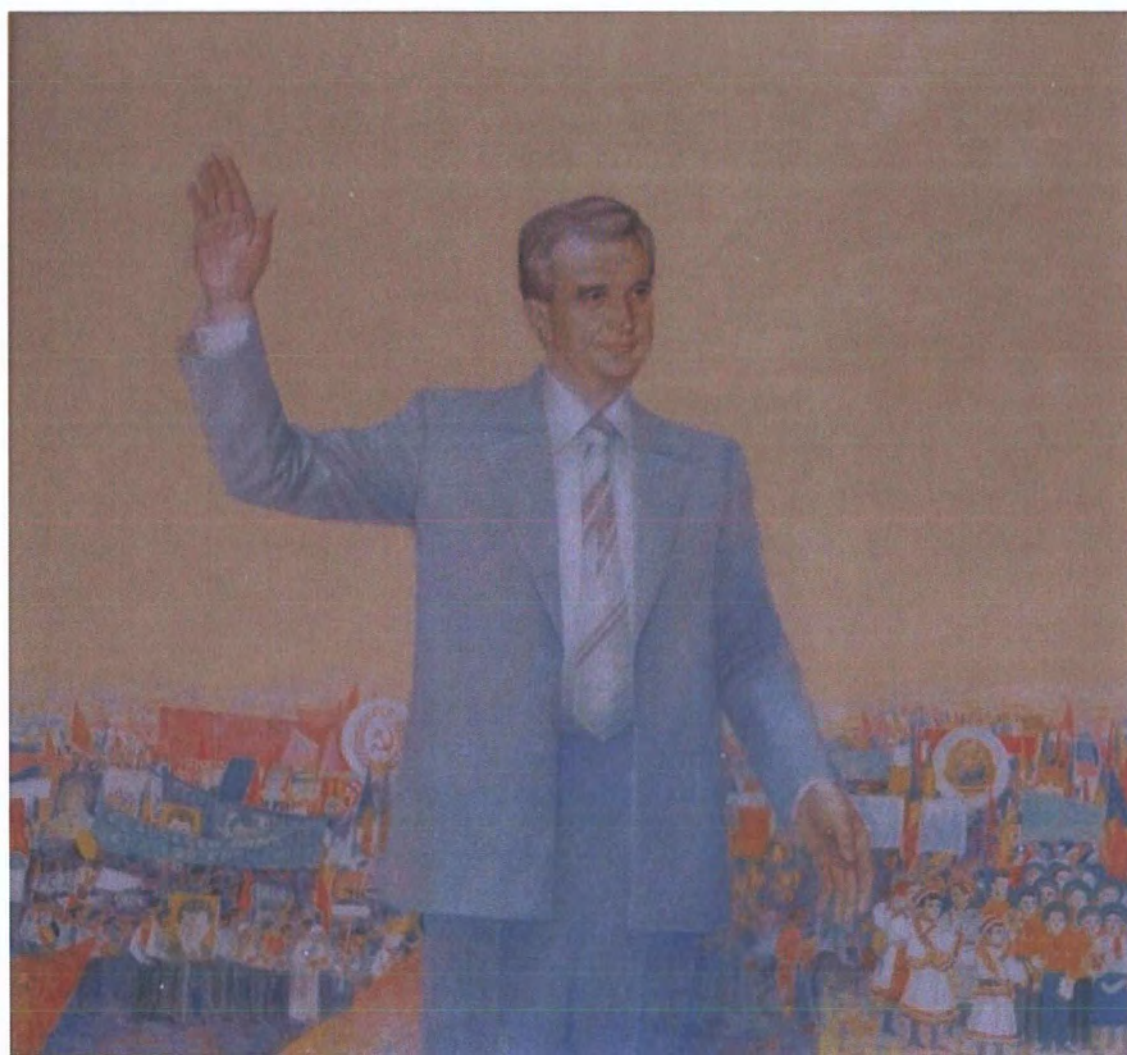


Plate 20, Vasile Pop Negreșteanu, *Zi de sărbătoare* (Day of Joy), 1987, 150 x 180

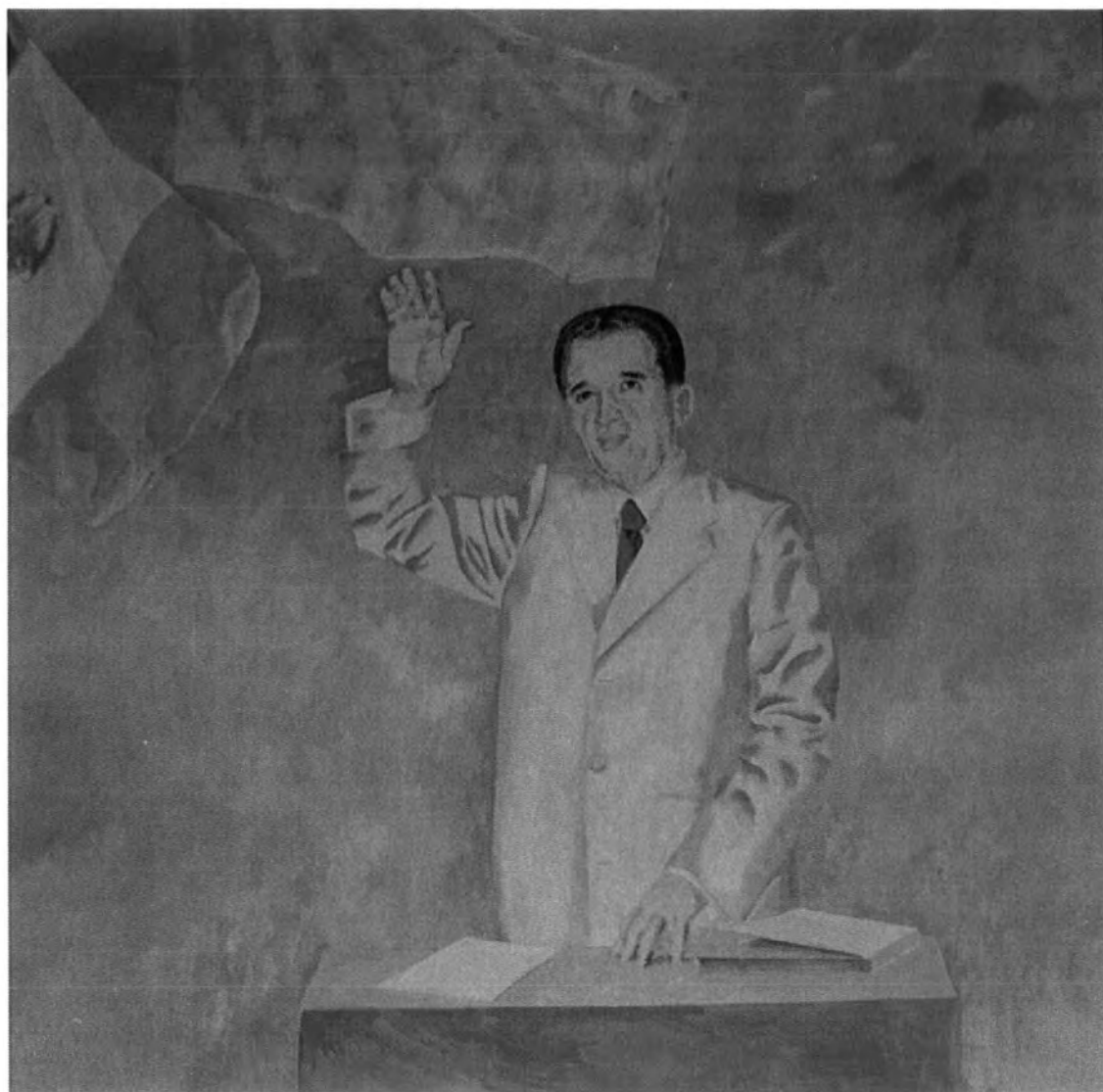


Plate 21, Ion Bitzan, *Omagiu tovarășului Nicolae Ceaușescu*
(Homage to Comrade Nicolae Ceaușescu), 1984, 180 x 180



Plate 22, Ion Bitzan, *Omagiu tovarășului Nicolae Ceaușescu*
(Homage to Comrade Nicolae Ceaușescu), 1986, 195 x 195



Plate 23, Vladimir Șetran, *Tovarășul Nicolae Ceaușescu*
(Comrade Nicolae Ceaușescu), 1986, 195 x 195



Plate 24, Viorel Mărgineanu, *Primăvara* (Spring), 1976, 175 x 190



Plate 25, Valentin Tănase, *Unitatea întregului popor în jurul partidului*
(The Unity of the Entire People around the Party), 1989, 120 x 181



Plate 26, Ion Șinca, *1 Mai 1939* (May 1, 1939), 1988, 160 x 195



Plate 27, Mihai Mănescu, *1 Mai 1939* (May 1, 1939), 1989, 135 x 200



Plate 28, Vintilă Mihăescu, *1 Mai 1939* (May 1, 1939), 1989, 140 x 200



Plate 29, Eugen Palade, *1 Mai 1939* (May 1, 1939), 1986, 130 x 150



Plate 30, Eugen Palade, *Demonstrație comunistă* (Communist Meeting), 1986, 198 x 240



Plate 31, Corneliu Ionescu, *Tovarășul Nicolae Ceaușescu și tovarășa Elena Ceaușescu la mitingul din 28 August 1944* (Comrade Nicolae Ceaușescu and Comrade Elena Ceaușescu participated in the meeting on August 28, 1944), 1987, 190 x 240

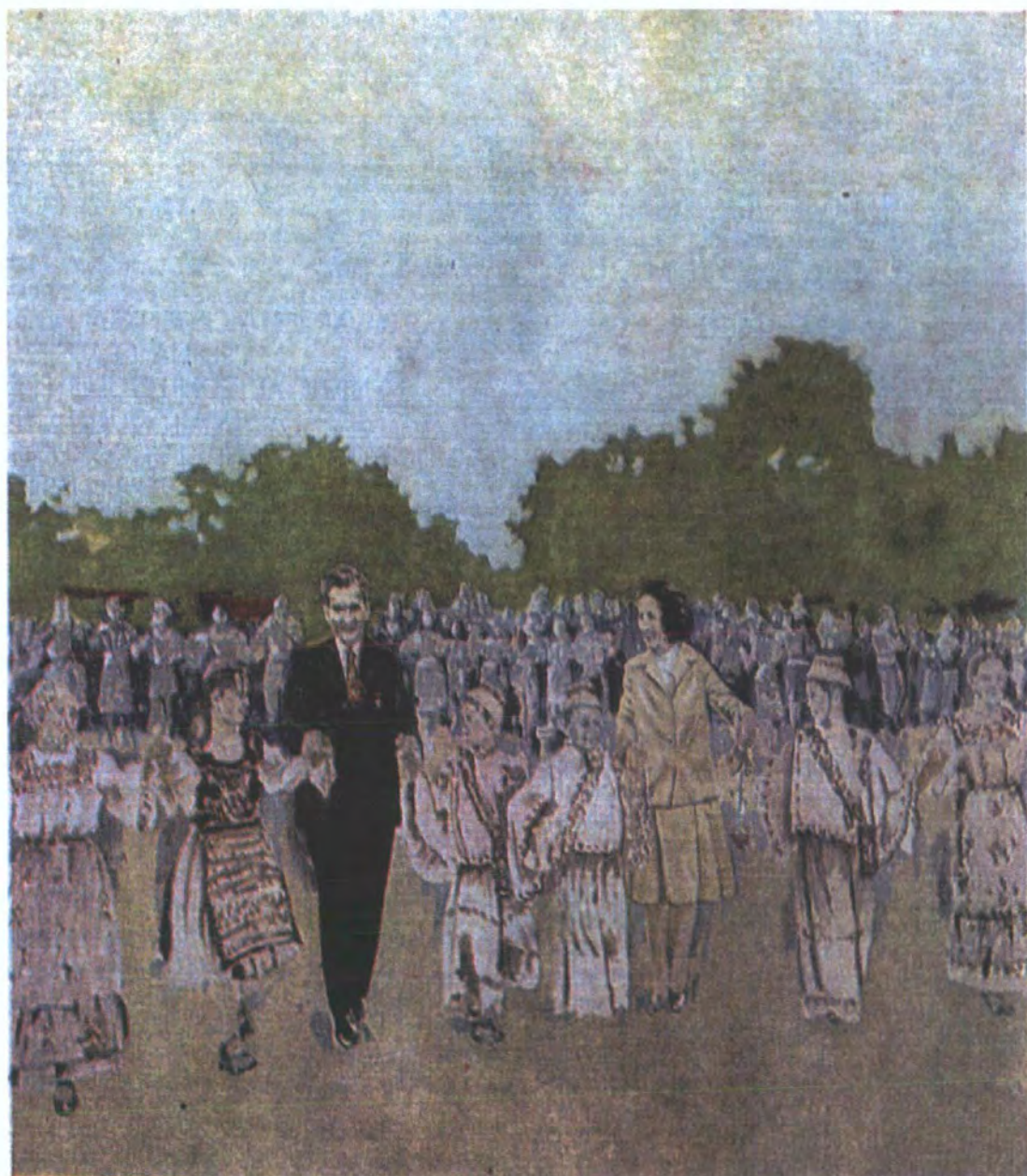


Plate 32, Ion Bitzan, *In mijlocul copiilor* (Among children), 1986, 195 x 195



Plate 33, Constantin Nițescu, *Tovarășul Nicolae Ceaușescu între constructorii șantierului Dunăre-Marea Neagră* (Comrade Nicolae Ceaușescu among the constructors of Danube-Black Sea Channel), 1978, 130 x 180



Plate 34, Doru Rotaru, *Tovarășul Nicolae Ceaușescu în vizită de lucru la canalul Dunăre-Marea Neagră* (Comrade Nicolae Ceausescu during a Work Visit to the Danube-Black Sea Channel), 1985, 215 x 265

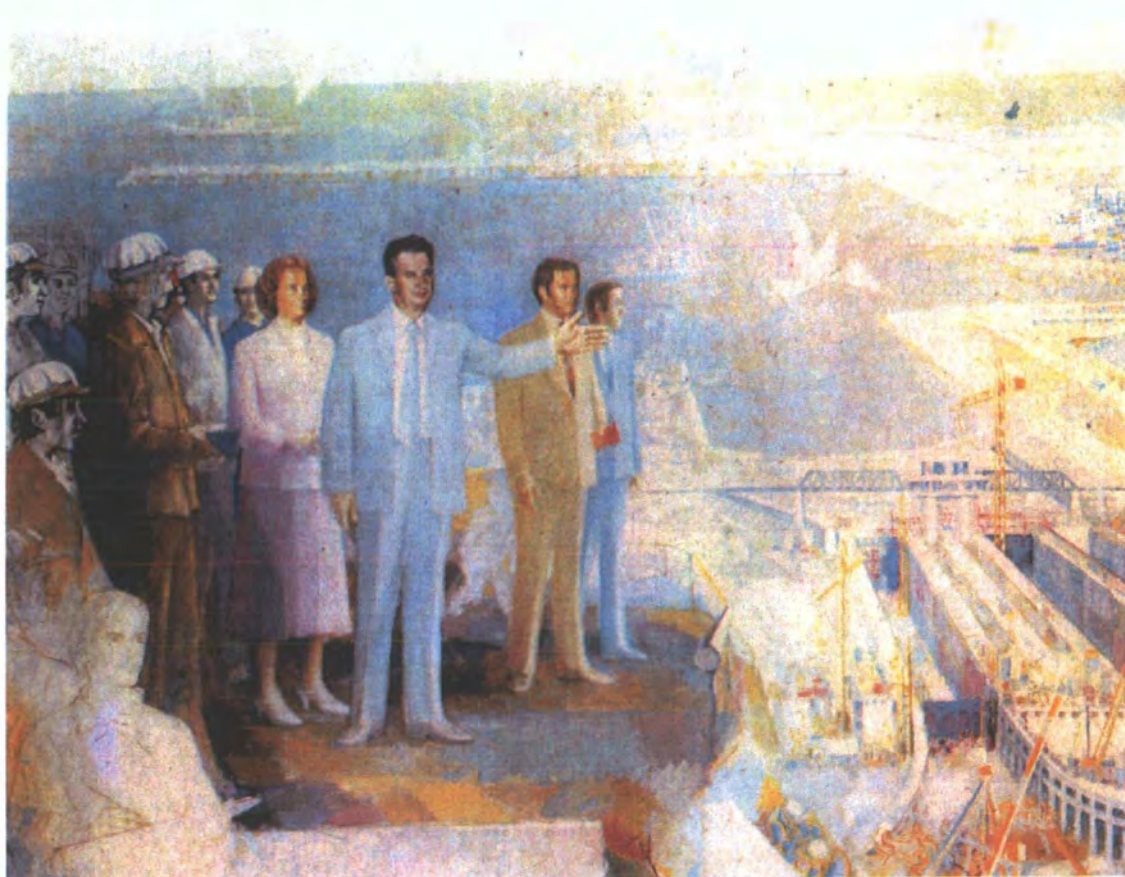


Plate 35, Vasile Pop Negreşteanu, *Vizita tovarăşului Nicolae Ceauşescu la canalul Dunăre-Marea Neagră* (The Visit of Comrade Nicolae Ceauşescu to the Danube-Black Sea Channel), 1987, 200 x 250



Plate 36, Valentin Tănase, *Vizită de lucru pe șantierul de amenajare a râului Dâmbovița* (Work Visit to the banks of Dâmbovița River), 1985, 200 x 230



Plate 37, Vasile Pop Negreșteanu, *Vizită de lucru, Noul Centru Civic, București*, (Work Visit, The New Civic Centre, Bucharest), 1986, 240 x 280



Plate 38, Eugen Palade, *Primăvara* (Spring), 1983, 220 x 220



Plate 39, Eugen Palade, *Vizită de lucru* (Work Visit), 1983, 190 x 220



Plate 40, Constantin Nițescu, *Tovarășul Nicolae Ceaușescu în vizită de lucru la minierii de pe Valea Jiului* (Comrade Nicolae Ceaușescu during a Work Visit to the Miners on the Jiului Valley), 1980, 190 x 265



Plate 41, Virgil Mihăescu, *Vizită de lucru* (Work Visit), 1983, 190 x 200



Plate 42, Ștefan Panait, *Constanța*, 1987, 220 x 265



Plate 43, Valentin Tănase, *Vizită de lucru* (Work Visit), 1982, 190 x 210



Plate 44, Ion Bitzan, *Modernizarea capitalei*
(The Modernisation of the Capital), 1989, 220 x 280



Plate 45, Gheorghe Ioniță, *Anii marilor construcții* (The Years of the Great Constructions), 1985,
230 x 250



Plate 46, Valentin Tănase, *Omagiu* (Homage), 1985, 200 x 220



Plate 47, Gheorghe Ioniță, *Raport oștășesc* (Military Report), 1982, 195 x 195

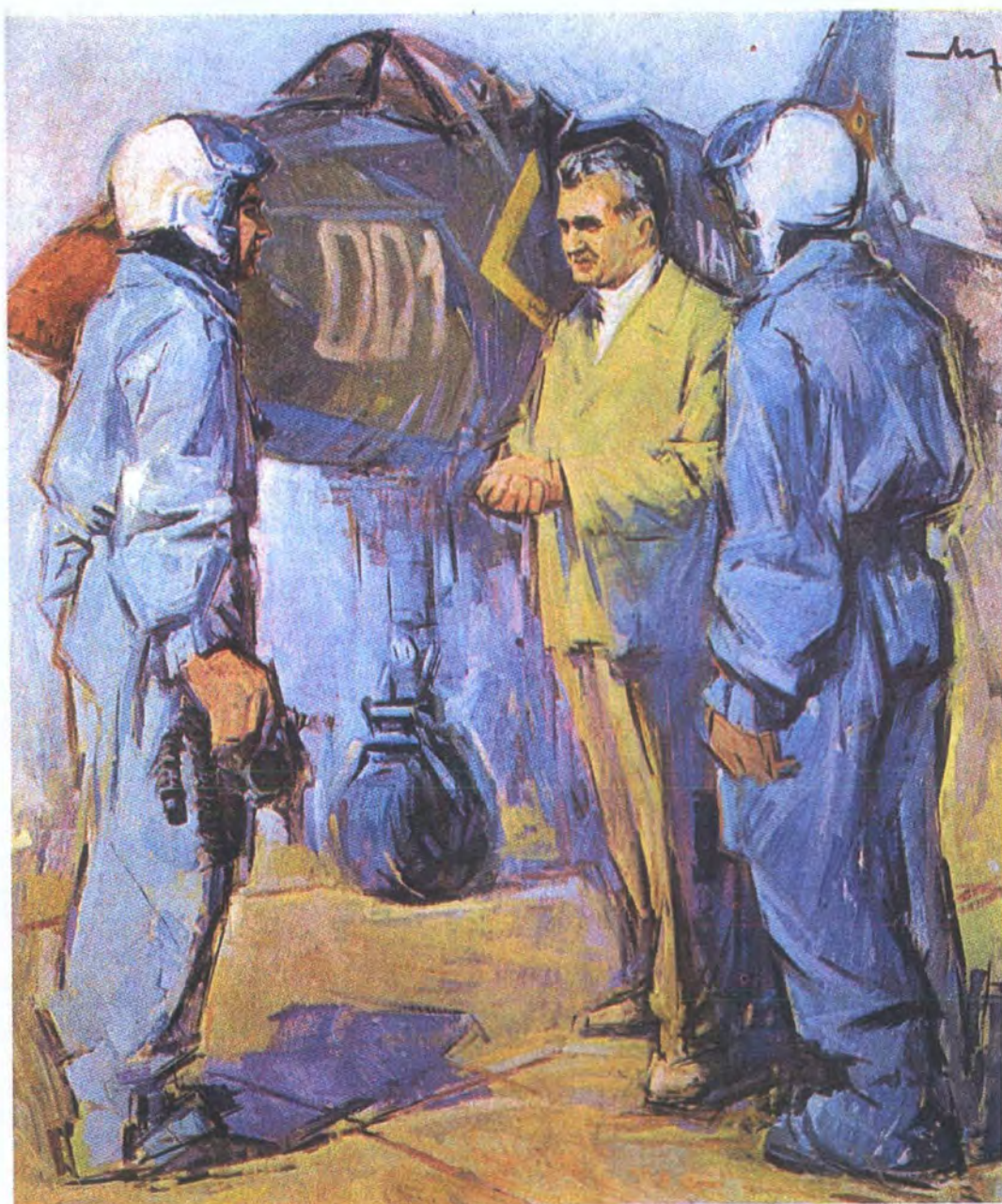


Plate 48, Ion Țărălungă, *Raport Comandantului suprem*
(Reporting to the Commander-in-Chief), 1982, 180 x 250



Plate 49, Ion Țarălungă, *Document ostășesc* (Military Document), 1981, 180 x 220



Plate 50, Mihai Mustăța, *În aplicație* (Military Application), 1981, 180 x 200



Plate 51, Dan Hatmanu, *Portret* (Portrait), 1984, 150 x 170



Plate 52, Constantin Nițescu, *Omăgiu* (Homage), 1988, 190 x 300



Plate 53, Ion Bitzan, *Tovarășul Nicolae Ceaușescu și tovarășa Elena Ceaușescu*
(Comrade Nicolae Ceaușescu and Comrade Elena Ceaușescu), 1981, 280 x 350



Plate 54, Sabin Bălașa, *Tineri între tineri* (Young among the Young), 1983, 235 x 275



Plate 55, Vasile Pop Negreșteanu, *Omagiu* (Homage), 1986, 180 x 180



Plate 56, Constantin Nițescu, *Omagiu* (Homage), 1985, 217 x 230

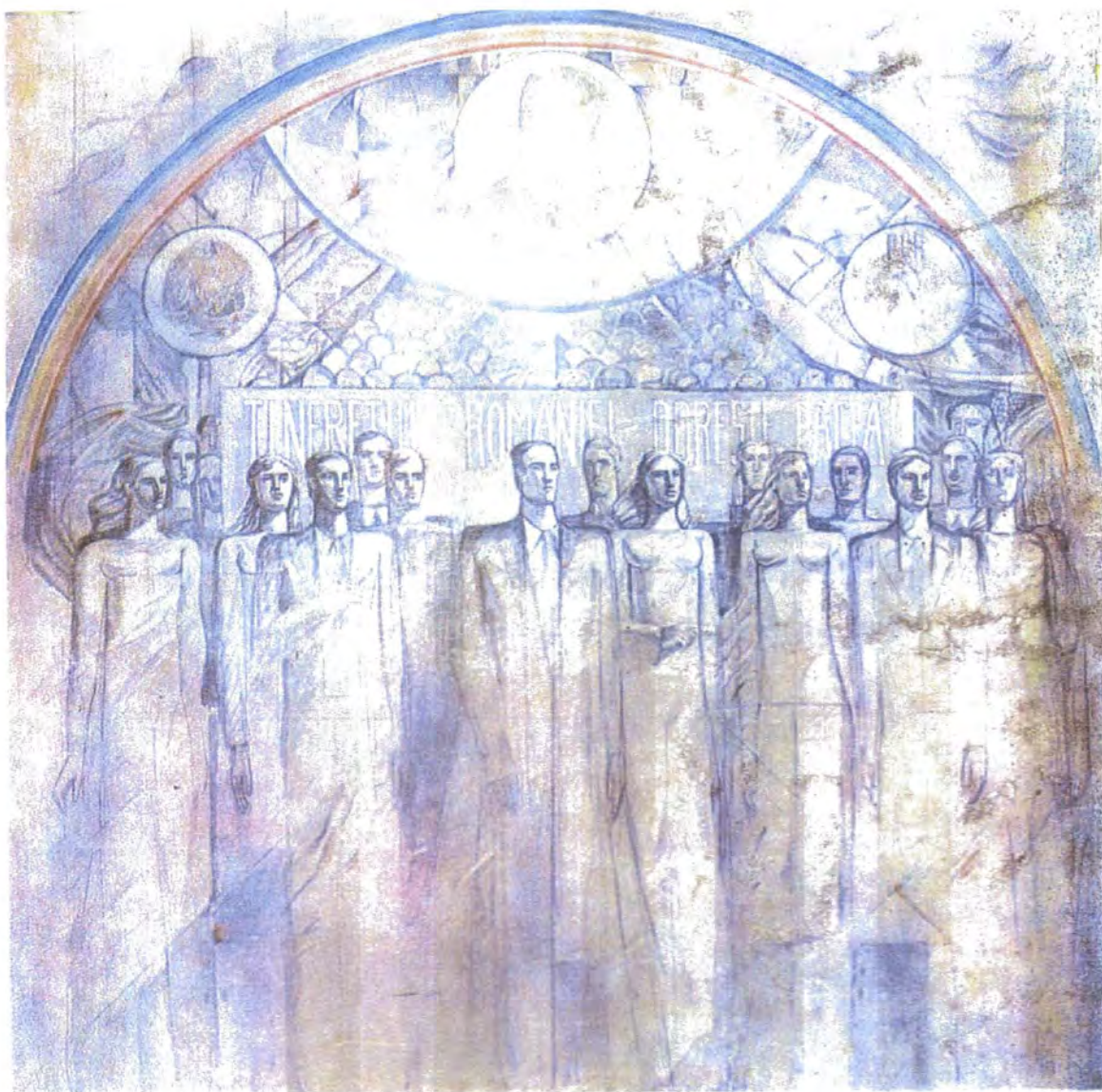


Plate 57, Geta Mermeze, *Marșul păcii* (The March of Peace), 1984, 200 x 230

